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Bass Guitar Magazine

THE UK'S NUMBER ONE BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

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DREAM THEATER

PLANET EARTH'S MOST TECHNICAL BASSIST?

SCOTT SHRINER, WEEZER

CRAIG ADAMS, THE MISSION

JEFF WALKER, CARCASS

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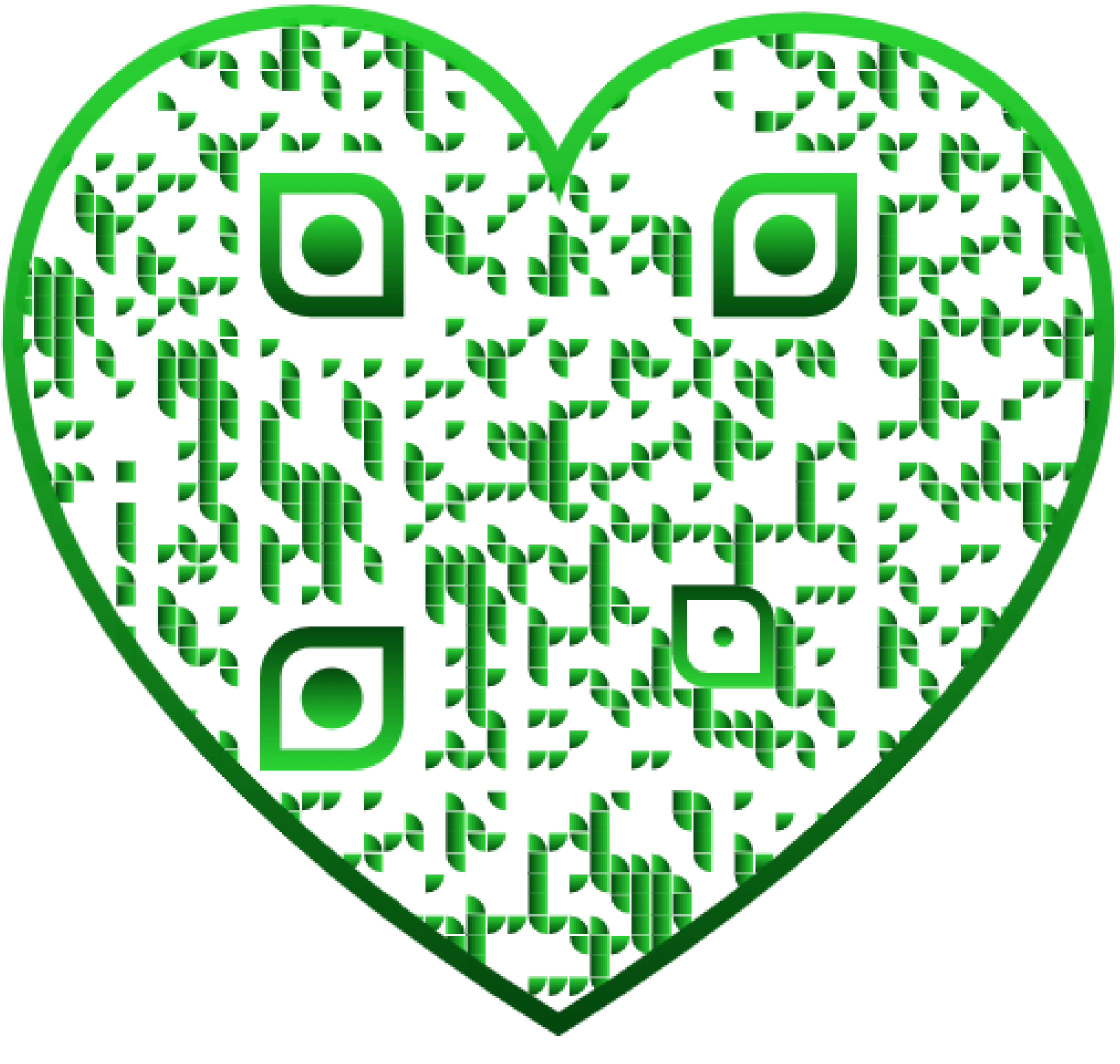

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***Bass Guitar Magazine* is proud to support the Music Industries Association.**

Ah, what a refreshing change. Our cover star this month is both insanely talented and unbelievably modest, a combination which very few of us can hope to approach, especially when your guitarist shouts the magic words 'Want to play a solo here?' in the middle of a jam. John Myung, for indeed it is he, has been quietly pushing forward the barriers of progressive bass playing for two decades with his band Dream Theater, firing off fusillades of notes in perfect unison and counterpoint with his equally dexterous bandmates, and leaving the rest of us open-mouthed in awe in doing so. Rather than ask the great man about his life, career, teenage escapades and what have you as per normal, we're focusing in our interview on the coolest and most technically challenging bass parts that he has recorded to date, leading to many a revelation about his phenomenal technique and all-round philosophy. And all this from a guy whose bands plays stadiums. We should be so lucky, eh?

We're all about variety here at the *BGM* command bunker, so we've also brought you interviews with Scott Shriner from the permanently tongue-in-cheek rockers Weezer and Jeff Walker of the über-heavy Carcass. Then there's an in-depth interview with the astoundingly experimental Jonas Hellborg, funked-up bass educator Andy Irvine and Craig Adams from British 'goff' legends The Mission. The same applies to our reviews section, where the gear on test runs from the price of a 'clean but used' BMW 520 to a mere few hundred quid. And of course, if you're looking for tuition, you'll find no better place to go than our hand-picked team of bass teachers, all tutors, music-school graduates, touring musicians or simply virtuosos. What are you waiting for? See you at the end of July!

Joel McIver, editor

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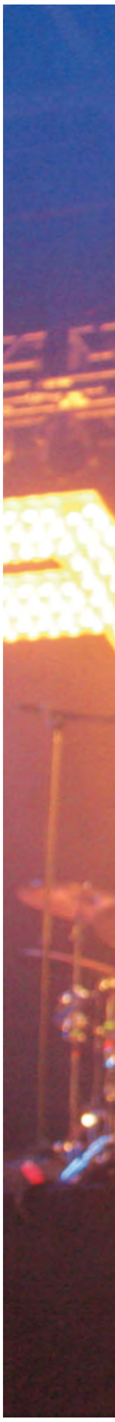

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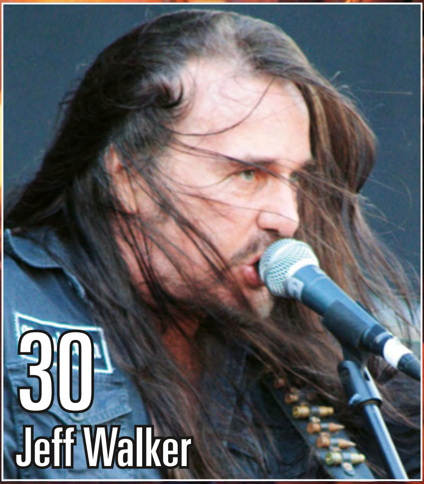

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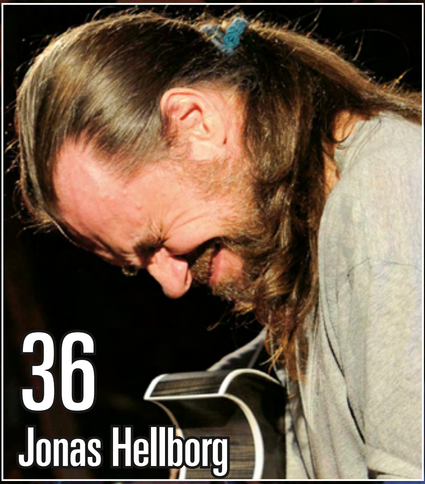

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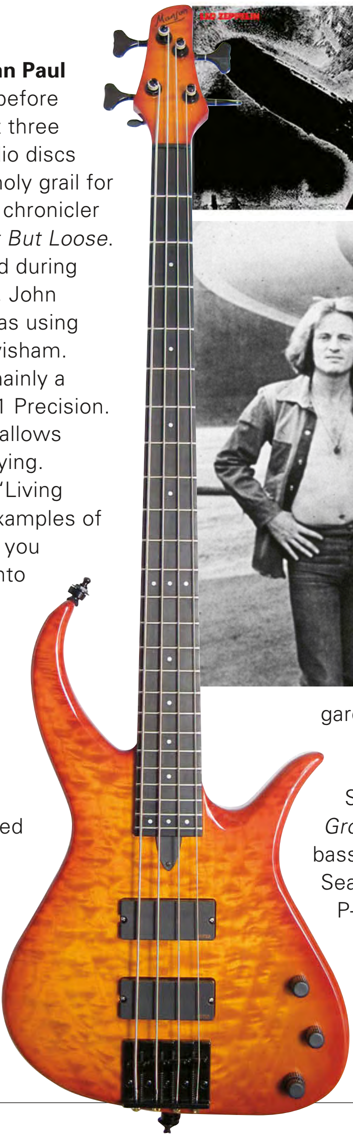
THE LOW DOWN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE BASS WORLD, BROUGHT TO YOU BY BGM'S TEAM OF FEARLESS NEWSHOUNDS

JOHN PAUL JONES ZEP FEAST



The much-acclaimed bass musicianship of John Paul Jones can be heard in greater effect than ever before with the recent reissue in early June of the first three Led Zeppelin albums, each with companion audio discs of previously unreleased material. "This is the holy grail for Zeppelin fans," explains Dave Lewis, long-time chronicler of the band via his Led Zeppelin magazine *Tight But Loose*. "This really captures the raw energy of the band during their first year together. In an interview for *TBL*, John revealed to me that in the early Zep days, he was using a Fender 1962 Jazz brought from a shop in Lewisham. In the studio on the first three albums, it was mainly a combination of the Jazz bass and a Fender 1951 Precision. Alternate takes on the new reissues such as 'Gallows Pole' really bring out the dexterity of John's playing. Instrumental backing tracks of 'Thank You' and 'Living Loving Maid' from *Led Zeppelin II* are further examples of the intricate bass-lines that lit up those songs – you can really hear the creative process that went into developing the songs as they were evolving''.

The plan ahead is to reissue all the Zep studio albums over the next year. For the 1976 *Presence* album and final album *In Through The Out Door*, released in 1979, Jones switched to eight-string basses. "John explained to me that he had the eight-string models custom-made by Bruce Bevar who worked at Alembic," recalls Lewis. "He also used a Hagstrom eight in the studio and on stage.''

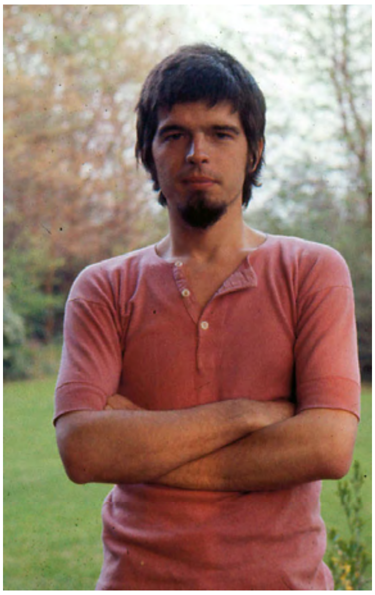
Post Zep, Jones has employed the services of Hugh Manson at Manson Guitars. Hugh Manson developed John's E Signature bass that he used with Them Crooked Vultures, his link up with Dave Grohl and Josh Homme. "John finds that very easy to play and admires its rich tone," adds Lewis. "He also employed the E35 for his more avant-garde work with Supersilent and the spin-off, Supersilent Minibus Pimps.'' This occasional outlet, which sees John working with Helge Sten, have just released an album, *Cloud To Ground*. John still employs more traditional basses, notably for his recent live work with Seasick Steve, which saw the return of his 1951 P-Bass.

Inevitably the Led Zep reissues will revive the 'Zep to reform' rumours, but John has plenty to keep him busy, including a full-scale opera based on August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata*, due to be completed next year.

Info: www.tightbutloose.co.uk.

BACK WITH BOWIE

Tony Visconti (legendary producer), Woody Woodmansey (legendary drummer), Glenn Gregory (Heaven 17) and Steve Norman (Spandau Ballet) will be performing David Bowie's *The Man Who Sold The World* album for several dates in September. So what, we hear we cry? Well, the cool thing for our particular community is that Visconti, obviously best known for his production skills, will be playing bass. Readers of a certain vintage will recall that it was in February 1970 that David Bowie took to the stage with his band, the Hype, and made people faint with his switch from folkie, 'Space Oddity'-style music to amped-up glam rock. Visconti was on bass, and the band eventually morphed into the Spiders From Mars, after which the rest was truly history. *The Man Who Sold The World* was produced by Visconti and featured Woodmansey. You see the significance now? Yes, you do.



Says Visconti, who we will be interviewing nearer the time: "One reason I'm looking forward to playing *The Man Who Sold The World* album in its entirety is because lots of people ask me if I still play bass. I do, but I've since rarely played anything as ambitious and demanding as the music of that great batch of songs conceived by David Bowie. With David as our charismatic frontman we were young Turks, determined to spin heads and change the world of music. Well, we sold about 20 copies instead. But over the years members of the public finally got it and eventually the album sold a million or two."

Info: www.ticketweb.co.uk.

LIVE BASS MAGIC

Visitors to the London Bass Guitar Show 2014 were gobsmacked by the sight of two of the UK's finest bassists, Steve Lawson and Jon Thorne, improvising a killer set on stage. The audio of that epic session, now titled *Diversion*, is available to purchase from www.stevelawson.net. We listened to it again and yes, it's as ace as it was the first time. Get in there!

SHURE THING

Shure Europe has announced details of a competition, Play For LA, in which winners will bag themselves a Shure Beta Digital Wireless Guitar Pedal System and will be flown to Los Angeles for three days to attend NAMM 2015. Entrants download backing tracks and upload a video of themselves playing bass (or guitar) along to their chosen track to the Shure Facebook page before 31 July. The winners will be chosen by Shure, one winner from UK, Benelux, Germany and France, and announced in late August.

Info and T&Cs: www.shure.co.uk/products/wireless_microphones/wireless_systems_guitarists.

SHURE®

Triumvirate

We select three essential albums from a genre or player.
THIS MONTH: Greg Lake

1 BRAIN SALAD SURGERY BY EMERSON, LAKE & PALMER

Everyone should own this album just for the amazing artwork by the now sadly deceased HR Giger, but you should also have it for the stunning bass playing by Greg Lake. With his trebly, pick-driven tone mixed to the fore, this is an acrobatic prog-fest. In particular check out the 30-minute long, three-movement epic 'Karn Evil' where Greg traverses the neck wildly with contrapuntal rhythms and rapid fills… all while nailing the lead vocals.

2 IN THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING BY KING CRIMSON

It's impossible to overestimate the impact this album had on the nascent prog-rock genre when it arrived in 1969. It also marked the arrival of Greg Lake. Initially hired as singer, he moved onto bass and lead vocals and ended up producing the album too – astonishing for a 22-year-old. Lake's bass playing set the bar for prog rock, with rapid horn-like lines on '21st Century Schizoid Man', the incessant pulsing of the title track and a more subtle supportive line on 'Epitaph'.

3 TARKUS BY EMERSON LAKE & PALMER

When this album emerged in 1971 with its bizarre mix of one single side containing a single prog epic, with a series of hard rock songs on the other, it encapsulated the sometimes contradictory nature of ELP. One thing that is constant is Lake's exemplary playing. 'Tarkus' sees plenty of finger-knotting runs and interesting rhythm and note choices, making it a virtual primer for anyone interested in prog playing. And on the second side there's plenty to enjoy, amid tracks like 'Jeremy Bender' and 'Are You Ready Eddy?'

SHAKA CAN

We have to give a firm thumbs-up and unashamed plug for the Shaka Zulu restaurant and live venue in Camden, London, where we saw *BGM* columnist and all-round bass Leg End Jeff Berlin strum the bass recently. Our man was playing at a Stevie Ray's Session night, as the venue is calling its live shows, alongside the legendary jazz guitarist Scott Henderson and equally acclaimed drummer Dennis Chambers and we can't think of a finer place in the Camden area for a touch of eyeball-swivelling jazz fusion. **Info: www.shaka-zulu.com.**

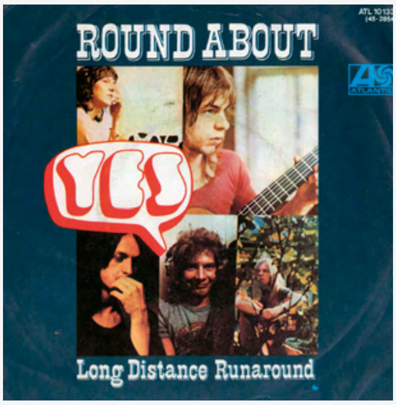
Revolver

Every month we tell you the bass-line we can't stop listening to

THIS MONTH:
'Roundabout'

Bassist: *Chris Squire*
Album: *Fragile by Yes*

This track defined the crunchy Rickenbacker sound that we all know and love. Squire's bass is gritty and has an undeniable bubbling groove, sort of Jaco with a pick if you will. The bouncing 16th notes are the driving force of this band, and he manoeuvres through the time changes – from 4/4 to 14/4 and 7/4 and back again – without a second thought. For some he never bettered this track, and for out and out fun it's hard to think of a better Squire line.

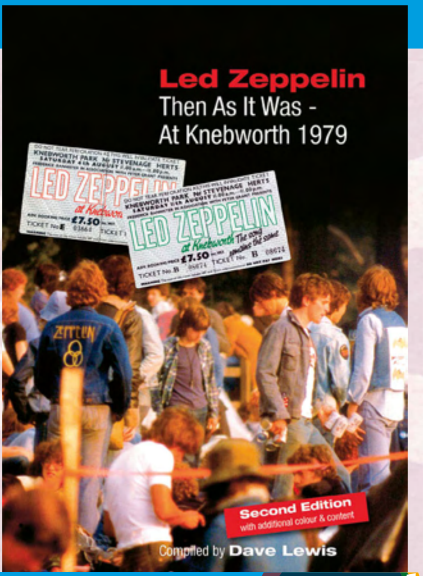


WIN!

Take away a copy of Led Zeppelin guru Dave Lewis's new book, *Then As It Was: Knebworth 1979*, featuring incredible amounts of info on John Paul Jones and the band as a whole, by solving this simple brain-teaser.

According to ye olde rock lore, who suggested the name 'Led Zeppelin'?
A Brian Cant
B Jimi Hendrix
C Keith Moon

Visit www.bassguitarmagazine.com/competitions to enter, or write to BGM Competition, Lawrence House, Morrell Street, Leamington Spa, CV32 5SZ. Closing date: 12 August.



WON!

A signed promo CD from Glenn Hughes's new band California Breed goes to Julio Damasceno. Thanks to all who entered.

BACK IN BLACK

Rotosound's Tru Bass RS88LD Black

Nylon strings have been re-engineered, the British firm informs us, using an innovative new manufacturing process. As they tell us: "New, computer controlled engineering process at their UK based factory, combined with Rotosound's skilled craftsmen, gives greater precision in production and improved quality of finish. The result is a bass string that is wonderful to the touch and produces a deep, warm, double bass-like tone. This is the nearest you'll get to a upright double bass sound played on an electric bass guitar. The superior coating protects the strings from perspiration, dirt, humidity and acid hands." Sounds useful to us, sweaty-handed types that we definitely are.

The new Tru Bass RS88LD strings are available in four- and five-string sets and non-standard scale lengths. **Info: www.rotosound.com.**

Hanby's Handy Hints

Send your gear-related queries to Chris Hanby at chris.hanby@me.com and he'll answer them here!

Dear BGM, could you please give me some advice on a couple of bass amps. I've owned so many over the last 40 years. My latest is a Genz Benz Shuttle Max 9.2, which have been discontinued. This particular amp is quite complex: there are so many potential sounds that unless you write the settings down you might never hear them again. I've been offered high-end Carvin amps and I wondered what your opinion was when comparing one to the other. I am a tad worried that the Carvin are cheap in comparison to reasonable/good quality amps in the market place. The amp in question is the new BX1600.

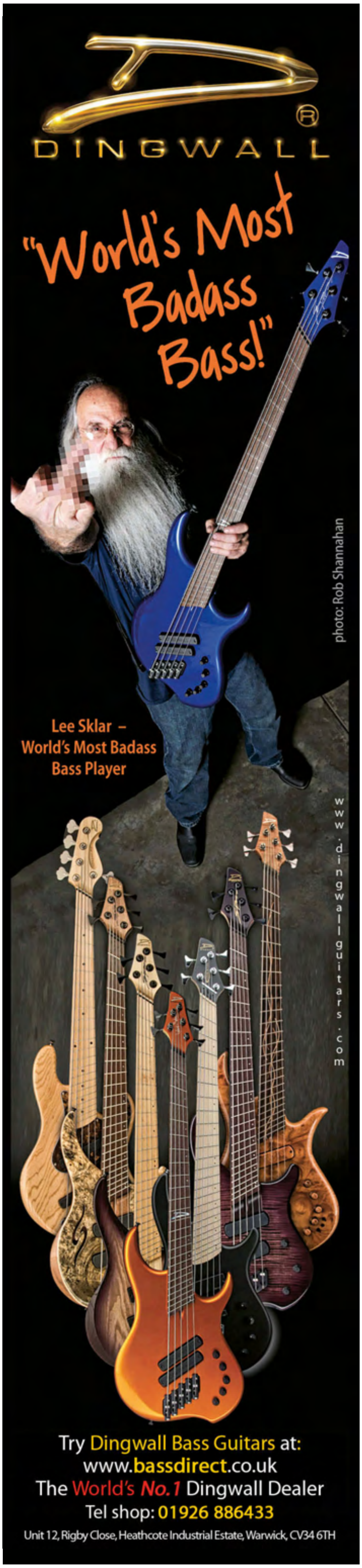
Den Finch

Chris says: Hi Den, thanks for your question. It's a little difficult to advise you on whether to change to the Carvin BX1600 or not without knowing your exact application for it. Style of music, the size of the venues you play, what cabs you have all play a part. I can however offer you my opinion. From what you say it seems that you are a little overwhelmed by the range of tones available in the Genz Benz Shuttle Max 9.2. They are indeed very versatile amps, with a clean modern sound and plenty of power and punch on tap. If you are struggling to remember your favourite settings, do what I do and take a quick picture on your phone. I can't see any reason to change unless you can't get the sound you are after from it. That said, Carvin are a respectable company that produce fine amps and quality instruments. The BX1600 is no exception, although it has about as wide a range in sound, power and functions as the Genz Benz, so you might encounter the same problems. My best advice, as with all equipment, is to try them side by side, preferably on a gig or studio session. Keep the one that gives you 'your' sound! CH

MUFF TING

Veteran effects builders Electro-Harmonix have announced new variants on their splendid Big Muff Pi, a new full-size version and the fun-size Nano model. The Deluxe Big Muff Pi adds a footswitchable MIDS section that enables the bassist to tailor the midrange and cut through the mix. Helpfully, the gizmo comes with an expression pedal input that lets you sweep the MIDS' frequency in real time with your size 11 Doc Marten. It's priced at around 160 of your finest US greenbacks, so expect an approximate equivalent in UK sterling. As for the Nano, which costs around $100, there's the usual Volume, Sustain, and Tone plus a Dry toggle switch, allowing a fixed level signal of the bass's dry tone through the pedal while letting you mix in the fuzz tone with the pedal's Volume knob. There's also True Bypass.

See www.ehx.com for info.



EVERY MONTH, EXPERT RESTORER SIMON MCVEIGH BRINGS A KNACKERED OLD BASS BACK TO LIFE. THIS MONTH, THE GREAT MAN BEGINS WORK ON A RICKENBACKER 4003

Well, I have a busy few months ahead of me as I am in full pre-production mode with my band The Swing Cats for our new album, which we will release towards the end of the year – more about that as it develops. In between recording and rehearsals, the big challenge I've set myself is to build a bass entirely from second-hand parts.

Simon McVeigh has been a session bassist for over 20 years, and works as a bass tutor at the Royal County School of Music in County Meath, Ireland. He has recorded with many artists and runs www.breadheadmusic.com, a contacts resource for professionals in the music industry.

I'll have the freedom to build anything (within reason) but there are two rules I've set out that I must adhere to:

- The bass must be built from parts that would be standard to a particular make and model. I don't want to end up with a bit of Fender and a bit of Gibson with a sprinkle of Rickenbacker as a sort of Frankenstein bass
- All parts must be sourced second-hand and be cheaper than the equivalent part bought new

Now we've set the ground rules, I can begin. In my constant search for bass bits I've noticed that an increasing number of online guitar dealers are stripping their second-hand and vintage guitars for parts rather than trying to sell the instruments as one piece. This may or may not be a symptom of the recession-hit times we live in, but I do see the economic thinking behind this business model, as each piece can achieve a premium auction price. If some guy in Bangkok is looking for a 1972 Fender Jazz bridge, or someone in Portsmouth is looking for the pickups from the said bass, there'll always be a buyer somewhere looking for the part and willing to pay top prices.

This creates a unique opportunity for people like me, who like to tinker with guitars, take them apart and try to put them back together. As I'm not a guitar maker as such and I don't have the skill to make a guitar out of a piece of wood, what I'll do is put one together from bits. The object is to end up with a finished, top-quality bass without cutting corners, which will cost me less than the equivalent instrument bought from a shop.

The first thing I needed was a decent bass carcass – and there were plenty to choose from out there when I had a proper look, but this 1996 Rickenbacker caught my eye. I got this body from a dealer in the US who seems to be quite reputable: the description in the ad matched the piece exactly when it arrived.

It has what I would describe as slight wear, with a few dings and dents, but the frets are all good and the neck is straight, so I have a good solid starting point. Needless to say the body and neck are all one piece, and the truss rods and nut are included, but that's it: besides that there's nothing else on the bass.

It's a blank canvas for me, and the possibilities are endless, but one thing I'm sure of at this point is that I won't be changing the colour. The finish on this bass is gorgeous and besides that, a refinish would put the bass way over budget.

I'd better get busy and start trawling the interweb for Rickenbacker bits and bobs: I currently have a bid on a set of machine heads. I have a feeling this is going to be a lot of fun...

Total cost: £255
For more info, or to buy any of my basses, email me at simonmcveigh@eircom.net.

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Fender

10166 - Fender 75 Jazz Bass in Natural
4219 - Fender American Deluxe Jazz, Sunburst
9083 - Fender Am Special Jazz Bass, Sunburst
9231 - Fender Am Standard Jazz Bass, Sunburst
12763 - Fender FSR Deluxe Precision Bass, SFG
12288 - Fender Mike Dirnt Road Worn Precision SB
13172 - Fender Modern Player Jazz Satin Sunburst
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9367 - Fender Select Jazz Bass, Amber Burst
12426 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass Brown Sunburst
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10997 - G&L Tribute SB2 4-String, Metallic Black

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12722 - Gibson Les Paul Bass, Heritage Cherry Sunburst
10074 - Gretsch G6073 Electrotone Bass, Burgundy
12218 - Hofner HCT Violin Bass Guitar in Blue
12188 - Hofner Violin Bass Ignition Sunburst

LEVIN

6780 - Levin LB400, Redburst

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8079 - Lodestone Primal Instinct P Bass, Green
8080 - Lodestone Primal Instinct Pbass Sunburst
8081 - Lodestone Primal Pro in Chignal Blue
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10102 - Overwater J Series Deluxe 4, Natural
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13048 - Tobias Toby Standard IV Bass, Ebony
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8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red

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5634 - Yamaha BB714BS Billy Sheehan, Lava Red
9000 - Yamaha RBX170
10314 - Yamaha RBX170EW Bass
4331 - Yamaha TRB1004J, Trans Black
10307 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass
13137 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass In Mist Green
13138 - Yamaha TRBX304 4 String Bass In White

5 String Basses

10109 - Cort A5 5 String Bass, Open Pore Natural
12538 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Open Pore Nat.
11014 - Fender Jazz Bass 5 String
13117 - Fender Deluxe Dimension Bass V Natural
11066 - G&L Tribute L2500 5 String Natural Gloss
9702 - G&L Tribute L2500 5-String In Walnut
8174 - Lodestone Primal Pro 5, Chignal Blue
12294 - Marleaux Consat Custom Bolt On 5 String
12198 - MusicMan Stingray 5 Honeyburst
9002 - Overwater Aspiration Deluxe Bass, Black
9009 - Overwater Contemporary 5-String Bass
10963 - Overwater Inspiration 5, Red Burst
12561 - Peavey Millenium BXP 5-String Bass
10960 - Pedulla Rapture Fretted 5-String Bass
5121 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black
11196 - Spector Bass Legend 5 Classic Blk Cherry
11195 - Spector Bass Performer 5 Black SP5BK
12406 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Amber
6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber
12896 - Yamaha BB1025 5 String Bass Guitar
9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass Guitar, Black
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
8023 - Yamaha TRB1005J 5 String, Caramel Brown
4889 - Yamaha TRB1005J Bass, Natural
10308 - Yamaha TRBX305 Bass
10310 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Acoustic Basses

4783 - Breedlove Atlas Stage BJ350/CR4 Ac.
8687 - Breedlove Passport Plus B350/CB4
5393 - Levin LAB150 Bass, Electro 4, Black
5394 - Levin LAB150 Bass, Electro 4, Natural
5392 - Levin LAB150 Bass, Electro 4, Sunburst
6782 - Levin LB100 Bass, Electro 4, Sunburst
12351 - Ortega D Walker White Short Scale
10498 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, Black
12307 - Tanglewood DB TAB Acoustic Bass
12361 - Tanglewood Odyssey TMO B2
13014 - Tanglewood TWRBE Travel Bass Guitar
12292 - Westfield PJB380 Acoustic Bass Natural

Electric Upright Basses

4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
12660 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass

Fretless Basses

6445 - Westcoast BG5 Fretless, Natural

String Deals

2 Sets of Elite (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Elite (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £35 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £40 inc P&P

Bass Combos

6762 - A arena BASS45 (45W, 1x12)
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)
4942 - AER Amp Two (240W, 1x12)

Ashdown Engineering

4389 - Ashdown 220 Touring 112 (220W, 1x12)
4388 - Ashdown 220 Touring 115 (220W, 1x15)
4385 - Ashdown 330 Touring 115H (300W, 1x15)
5066 - Ashdown 550 Touring Hybrid (550W, 2x10)
6759 - Ashdown ABM C115 500 Evo 3 (1 x15)
11192 - Ashdown ABM C115H Neo Evo 3 Combo
6459 - Ashdown ABM C210T-500 EVO 3 (575W)
12259 - Ashdown ABM Mini 115 NEO Bass Cab
12258 - Ashdown ABM Mini 210 NEO 2x10 Cab
11193 - Ashdown ABM NEO C210 400W 2x10
8712 - Ashdown ABM414H 4 x 10 Bass Cabinet
8714 - Ashdown After Eight 20 Bass Combo
13135 - Ashdown DH15 C110 Drophead Combo
13134 - Ashdown DH30 C115 Drophead Combo
8757 - Ashdown Electric Blue 12 220
8758 - Ashdown Electric Blue EB15 220
8751 - Ashdown Five Fifteen ABM100 Combo
8753 - Ashdown Five Fifteen Mini Rig 100
8718 - Ashdown Mag C115 300 Evo III Combo
8722 - Ashdown Mag C210T 300 Evo III Combo
8720 - Ashdown Mag C210T 300 Bass Combo
8727 - Ashdown Mag C410T 600 Evo III
9320 - Ashdown MiBass C110-200
9321 - Ashdown MiBass C115 550 Bass Combo
8750 - Ashdown Perfect Ten 40 Bass Combo
9311 - Ashdown TE12 C115h Bass Combo
9310 - Ashdown TE12 C210h 12 Band Combo
5224 - Ashdown Tourbus 10 (10W, 1x6.5)
5062 - Ashdown Tourbus 15 (15W, 1x8)
13122 - Ashdown Vintage Twelve 75 Bass Combo
8988 - EA Euphonic Audio iAmp 350 Bass Head
12430 - Eden EC10 50 Watts Bass Amp Combo
12432 - Eden EC15 180W Bass Amp Combo
12431 - Eden EC210 2 x 10 Bass Amp Combo
12429 - Eden EC8 20 Watt Bass Combo

Fender

4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
12745 - Fender Rumble 200 Bass Combo
8284 - Fender Rumble 30 Bass Combo
4237 - Fender Rumble 350 (350W, 2x10)
4772 - Fender Rumble 75 Watt Bass Combo

Hartke

10104 - Hartke A35 35W Bass Combo
9278 - Hartke A70 Solid State Bass Amp Combo
9471 - Hartke David Ellefson A70 Bass Combo
9008 - Hartke HMH112C Bass Combo
9281 - Hartke Hydrive HMH210C Bass Combo
9279 - Hartke Kickback 15 Bass Amp Combo

Mark bass

9004 - Markbass 121 Lite Alain Caron Combo
6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P Bass Combo
6238 - Mark Bass CMD103H (400W, 3x10)
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin(300W,1x15)
5473 - Mark Bass Micromark (50W, 1x6)
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P(300W, 1x12)
5474 - Mark Bass Mini CMD151P(300W, 1x15W)
5471 - Mark Bass Minimark (250W, 2x6)
5475 - Mark Bass CMD121H (300W, 1x12)

Marshall

9940 - Markbass Mini CMD 151 Jeff Berlin
9939 - Markbass MiniMark 802 Bass Combo
5433 - Marshall MB4210 (450W, 2x10)
5658 - Marshall MB4410 (450W, 4x10)
6769 - Marshall MB60 (60W, 1x12)
9938 - MicroMark 801 Bass Combo
5234 - Orange Crush PiX 25BX (25W, 1x8)
5233 - Orange Crush PiX 50BXT (50W, 1x12)
10265 - Orange Crush Pix CR100BXT
10264 - Orange Terror Bass 500 Bass Combo
8061 - Peavey MAX126 10 Watt Bass Combo
11005 - Peavey Max 110 Bass Amp Combo
5965 - Peavey Max 112 (35W, 1x12)
5964 - Peavey Max 115 (50W, 1x15)
11004 - Peavey Max 158 Bass Amp Combo
6320 - Roland CB100 (100W, 1x12)
4433 - Roland CB120XL Cube 120X (120w,1x12)
4435 - Roland Cube 20XL BASS (20W, 1x8)
4434 - Roland Cube 60XL (60W, 1x10)
5678 - Roland Microcube Bass RX, (5W, 4x4)
4599 - TC Electronic BG500 115 500W, 1x15

Bass Heads

13136 - Ashdown ABM400LITE Lightweight Head
4387 - Ashdown 330, 330W
4398 - Ashdown 427 Small Block 427W
4384 - Ashdown 550, 550W
8706 - Ashdown ABM1000 Lite Evo III
8704 - Ashdown ABM2000 Lite Evo III
6760 - Ashdown ABM500 EVO III 575W
6250 - Ashdown ABM500RC Evo III 575W
6761 - Ashdown ABM900 EVO 3, 575+575W
4399 - Ashdown JJ500 JJ Burnel Sig 575W
5338 - Ashdown BTA400 400W
13131 - Ashdown CTM100 100W Valve Bass Head
11229 - Ashdown CTM15 15 Watt Bass Amp Head
8707 - Ashdown CTM300 Classic Tube Magnifier
5064 - Ashdown Little Bastard 30, 30W
8708 - Ashdown Little Bastard 550 Head
6455 - Ashdown MAG300H Evo III 300W
10938 - Ashdown MIBASS 2.0 640w Small Head
8713 - Ashdown Mag600 Head Evo III Bass Head
8710 - Asdown MiBass 220
7975 - Ashdown MiBass 550 Bass Amp Head
9309 - Ashdown TE12 500H 12 Band Bass Head
9349 - Hartke HA2500 Bass Head
9027 - Hartke Kilo 1000 Bass Head
12382 - Hartke LH1000 Bass Head
10408 - MarkBass Bass MultiAmp Stereo
5675 - Mark Bass Little Mark 250 (250w)
5245 - Mark Bass Little Mark 800, 800W
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head 500w
9035 - Markbass Little Mark III Tube Bass Head
5244 - MarkBass Little Mark Tube 800, 800W
5243 - Mark Bass SD1200, 1200W
7962 - Markbass TTE500 Randy Jackson Head
9256 - Markbass Big Bang 500W Bass Head
9250 - Markbass Classic 300 Head
9941 - Markbass Little Mark 250 Head Black
9249 - Markbass L Mark Rocker 500 Bass Head
9255 - Markbass Momark Modular Bass Systems
9944 - Markbass MultiAmp
9725 - Markbass TTE800 Randy JacksonHead
5652 - Marshall MB450H 450W
6618 - Marshall VBA400 Valve 400W
6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
5242 - Orange TB1000 1000W Terror
5351 - Orange Terror Bass 500 TB500
5957 - Peavey Pro VB3 300W
5960 - Peavey Tour 450, 450W

Bass Cabinets

8733 - Ashdown 210T Deep Lite Bass Cab
6457 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15)
6456 - Ashdown ABM410H (4x10)
4376 - Ashdown ABM610 (6x10)
5677 - Ashdown ABM810 (8x10)
4394 - Ashdown CL115 Large (1x15)
4393 - Ashdown CL410H (4x10)
4392 - Ashdown CL414H Plus Horn (4x10)
4391 - Ashdown CL610 Tilt-Cab (6x10)
4390 - Ashdown CL810 (8x10)
6146 - Ashdown NEO115H Compact (1x15)
6147 - Ashdown Klystron NEO 210 Secondhand
6452 - Ashdown MAG115 Deep (1x15)
6451 - Ashdown MAG210T Deep (2x10)
8754 - Ashdown MAG414T Deep Lite
8730 - Ashdown Mag 115 Deep Lite Bass Cab
8755 - Ashdown Mag410T Deep 4 x 10 Bass Cab
8756 - Ashdown Mag810T 8 x 10" Bass Cab
9315 - Ashdown Mi10 Bass Cab
9316 - Ashdown Mi12 Bass Cab
4379 - Ashdown VS115 200 (1x15)
8691 - Ashdown VS212 200 2 x 12 Bass Cab
8711 - Ashdown VS412 600 Bass Extension Cab
9007 - Hartke HCH112 Bass Cab
9292 - Hartke HCH410 Hydrive 410 Bass Cab
4766 - Mark Bass NY804 New York 804 (8 x 4)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV102P (2x10)
5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x 12 Bass Cab
10412 - Markbass NY122 2 x 12 Bass Cab
10409 - Markbass NY151 1 x 15 Bass Cab
10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
10411 - Markbass NY604 Bass Cab
6767 - Marshall VBC412 (4x12)
6617 - Marshall VBC810 (8x10)
6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
10266 - Orange OBC210 Bass Guitar Speaker Cab
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)
5239 - Orange SP212 Smart Power Isobaric (2x12)
6766 - Peavey 410TVX (4x10)

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

THE BASS SCHOLARSHIP

RARES DIACONU LEARNS TO GO IT ALONE

We're in our sixth week at the Institute, and classes are cooler than ever! One thing that's really exciting for me is that we're starting to do a bass solo almost every week in our advanced performance workshop. I wasn't used to improvising solos that much before coming here, so it's a challenging and interesting thing to do.

I have found that the most important thing when preparing ideas for a solo is trying to create a melody and develop it bit by bit. However, I think that having knowledge of harmony and how to apply it on your fretboard can (consciously or unconsciously) help you in this situation as well.

Let's dive into some harmony, shall we? We're going to look at harmonising the major scale, a concept that I have found useful in many contexts, from the one mentioned above, to analysing songs or just creating cool bass-lines. For now we are going to look at harmonising a major scale in triads (three-note chords), and playing them as triad arpeggios (one note at a time).

Before going to the actual process of harmonising let's just make sure we're on the same page with how the triads are built. There are four types of triads, although we're only going to use three of them today, built by stacking thirds as follows.

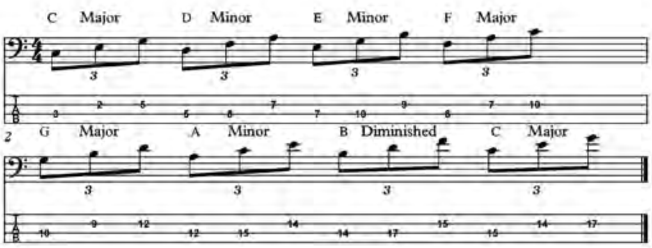
Major triad = major 3rd + minor 3rd (as steps in a scale, that would be root, major 3rd, perfect 5th)
Minor triad = minor 3rd + major 3rd (root, minor 3rd, 5th)
Diminished triad = minor 3rd + minor 3rd (root, minor 3rd, 5th)
Augmented triad = major 3rd + major 3rd (root, major 3rd, 5th)

Harmonising a major scale implies building triads from every degree of it. Note that the triads will be diatonic, which means we're only going to use notes from the scale we choose.

Let's use the C major scale (C D E F G A B) as an example. Using our theory knowledge, the first triad will be C major (C – E – G), which is a major triad because C to E = major 3rd and E to G = minor 3rd (also, C to G = perfect 5th). The second, consisting of D – F – A, is going to be a minor triad: D to F = minor 3rd and F to A = major 3rd. The idea is pretty simple, isn't it?

On the stave at the bottom you can see a way in which you can play the harmonised scale, covering one octave.

Take your time to assimilate this concept and have fun doing it. Until next time, stay on the low frequency!



BASSICALLY SPEAKING

BASSISTS REVEAL THE TRICKS OF THEIR TRADE FASTER THAN A SNAPPING D STRING

GEAR
BASSES Fender Jazz/Precision custom, Gibson Grabber G3
EFFECTS Boss Digital Delay D6, MXR Boost
AMPS Acoustic 4x15, Ampeg SVT-VR

SHAUN AVANTS, SCORPION CHILD

I describe my bass style as 'androgynous'. There's definitely the fast, agressive, testosterone-driven style that inevitably comes with playing rock and roll music, but I really try and express the sexuality and groove that gives the music feeling. It's relatively easy to just punch note after note, but it takes finesse and grace to really capture the backbeat. It's a symbiotic relationship and I dont believe either mood would stand out as much without the existence of the other.

I don't slap and I don't use picks. There are so many advantages to fingerstyle playing. First of all, I feel like you get a much more controlled tone and volume out of each note. There are so many dynamics in our songs that I need the versatility to give those parts their deserved character and nuance. Second, it allows me to flourish notes within the measures. For instance, I can open up a G chord by hitting two or three harmony notes in tow, which then fills out the spaces where the guitars ring out as opposed to hitting the same fret over and over. I actually use that technique frequently to enhance the pocket that Jon (our drummer) and I have locked into. Ultimately, I really just learned that style because it's sexy as hell!

My favourite bass to this day would definitely be the Gibson Grabber that I used on the Clutch/Orange Goblin tour. The shape and sound really works for me and what I do. For the longest time, I used a custom bass that I built. I took the neck of my original P-Bass and put it on a Jazz body. I ordered all the rest of the parts through the internet or from local shops and had a friend help me solder the electronics. That bass is still my baby, but doesn't quite deliver the punch I get out of my Gibson. My bass heroes are typically those that really put their personality into their craft. The bass has always been this overlooked instrument that is overshadowed by the flair and finesse of the guitar. Everyone wants to be a guitar hero, but if you really create something special, you can level the playing field. John Paul Jones, Noel Redding, Jack Bruce, and many others played in the shadows of legendary guitar players, but they made their mark regardless. Hell, Geezer Butler wrote most of Sabbath's stuff!

www.scorpionchild.com

GEAR
BASSES Dean John Entwistle Signature Spider bass
AMPS Sansamp RBI Bass Driver

GARETH MURDOCK, ALESTORM

I definitely consider myself to be one of those 'flat out all of the time' bass players. I would be happy with just an on/off switch and no knobs on a bass. I like to do it the Lemmy way. I do not play five- or six-string bass. If I wanted to play a six-string then I would just be a guitarist, and nobody likes a guitarist. I leave slap bass to Prince. He is the greatest artist of the last century and there is no point in trying to compete. I found that once I mastered stamina in my hands, then there was no riff I found too difficult. You can achieve this by gardening or masturbating a lot. My first bass was one of those 'my first bass' kits with a free amp, soft case, plectrum and songbook. Complete piece of shit it was. My favourite and definitely my most overused bass was the Dean Hillsboro, which is Eric Bass from Shinedown's signature model. I have never even heard Shinedown, but it's a lovely bass.

www.alestorm.net

DERRICK HODGE

I'm performing at the Love Supreme Jazz Festival, which runs from 4-6 July. See www.lovesupremefestival.com for info. Our set at the festival is about high energy, honesty, and presence! What I love about this band is how everyone adapts to any situation, any audience, and gives the best we have to give. I play four, five and six-string basses. It totally depends on how I'm feeling and what the moment calls for. I've never been one to swear by just one bass set-up. Slapping is something I used to do a whole lot of. I think over time I've worked more within a framework of fingered nuance, but like most things, I don't swear by anything. Keeps things interesting! The secret to playing the bass well? Hmm... There is no secret to that general question. I'd say just listen and practise. Keep your mind and ears open. The problem with formulae is that we close off possibilities. My first bass was a white Blade four-string Precision. Oddly, I don't have a favourite bass to date. I love specific aspects of a few, and go with the flow. I must mention Tim Cloonan at Callowhill Guitars though. He is a true artist when it comes to making fine instruments. I have so many bass heroes that it would be hard to list. I can't ignore the early influences though: Jimmy Haslip, Marcus Miller, Jaco Pastorius, James Jamerson, John Patitucci, Reggie Parker, Flea, so many. My band is touring my Bluenote release *Live Today*. It's been a blast. Along with composing, and preparing for my next record, this has kept me busy.

www.derrickhodge.com

SAM BELL, THE LUKA STATE

The secret of playing bass well is paying close attention to the drumbeat and not being too fancy. There's a time and a place for solos and that's almost always the lead guitarist's job. My first bass was a 1980s Rickenbacker, which I got for my 15th birthday and I absolutely love it to pieces. It's had some wear and tear over the years and now it's been retired to rehearsals only. I was lucky enough to get the chance to play a 1965 Hofner in a studio in Toronto. The tone was unbelievable and so distinctive. I just couldn't resist jamming a few classic Beatles hits. My heroes have got to be Bruce Foxton, John Entwistle and Paul McCartney. I actually got Bruce to sign my Rickenbacker a few years ago when we supported From The Jam. The greatest bass player that ever lived is Paul McCartney for sure. His bass-lines are probably the most memorable part of all the big Beatles songs. The way 'Taxman' starts gets me every time. The last thing I heard that really turned me on was the bass tones on the Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds album. The sound of the bass on the breakdown about three minutes in to 'Everybody's On The Run' is amazing. It sounded even better live.

www.thelukastate.com

MARC LYNN, GOTTHARD

I play band-oriented parts that the songs deserve. I don't care about becoming a famous bass player. I've played five-string basses since the beginning of Gotthard. For Gotthard I need the fifth string a lot, more than the high notes. I hate detuning basses and changing basses frequently in the live set. One bass and one sound for the whole show. The low keys for rock in these days are a must. To play in a band you must have the overview at all the times. You play with everyone, not alone. A bass player in rock is mainly here to bring the bottom end, to support the song and to unite the whole band. My bass heroes are Bob Daisley, Steve Bailey and Cliff Williams. The greatest bass player that ever lived was James Jamerson – he made the bass modern. Forget creating your own bass sound, adjust it to the songs and the style of your band. Don't think too much, listen, plug in and play – you will feel it.

www.gotthard.com

GEAR

BASSES 'Fullerton' 57 RI Fender Precision, Bluesman Jazz with Flying Mojo pickups, Gibson EB
EFFECTS JHS Pandamonium, Rotosound RI fuzz
AMPS Orange AD200B MK3, Orange cabsXotic BB Distortion, 3Leaf Audio You're Doom, 3Leaf Audio Envelope Filter

DAVE BESTE, RIVAL SONS

I own a five-string and I find it occasionally useful in the studio, but it just looks wrong live in my opinion. Four is all you'll ever need on stage and the role of bass in a band is usually need not want. I have a few six-strings, I call them guitars. Slapping? It depends. I've definitely done it in the past. Completely inappropriate for Rival Sons' material. But in sessions when the tune calls for it, I will not automatically shy away. Good bass players understand that the guitar player, the singer, the keyboard player and even the drummer can (and definitely will) get loose and off the groove. The bass is the rudder on the ship that steers and keeps all the other components on course. It's the ambassador between rhythm and melody. My first bass was an early 90s Fender Precision Lyte that I bought by saving my school lunch money everyday in seventh grade. My bass heroes are pretty diverse. Obviously the classic answers apply: James Jamerson, Paul McCartney. Those are a given. But I was definitely also influenced by Sting, Bakithi Kumalo, Stuart Zender, Richard Cousins, Tommy Shannon, Geddy Lee and probably many others I'm unaware of. The absolute best thing you can do for learning how to play bass melodically is to study classical guitar. We just wrapped up a new record, *Great Western Valkyrie*, and it will be released in early June. We'll be hitting Europe, Canada and the US this summer.

www.rivalsons.com

AMY LAVERE

I like to keep things really simple and get into the repetitive, deep groove. I also enjoy the nuance of tone and adding color and dynamic with subtle pressure and intensity while keeping things way deep in the pocket. Knowing how to make one sustaining note on the upright sound beautiful is an art all to itself. I do slap and love a fun show where that is called for. I don't write songs that require it, usually, but having cut my teeth both on Lower Broadway in Nashville and Beale Street in Memphis, I put in lots of time playing classic country and blues. So I enjoy the times when I'm asked to play bass for someone doing that type of music. Some highlights for me getting to play this way include backing up Wanda Jackson on a few shows, touring with Seasick Steve, sitting in with Big Sandy and his Fly-Rite Boys or Dale Watson. Getting to be a part of Cindi Lauper's blues record was an honour. The secret of playing any instrument well is listening. Listening to the story of a song is paramount to me. To do what naturally supports the emotion of what the song is trying to say. I've seen children 'play' percussion more sensitively and brilliantly than a pro drummer. A child can often play along with a song effortlessly because they can lose themselves in the story and it and they aren't distracted by ego. Listening to the other band members and try to blend in to the pull of the collective is my other aim... and when and if nothing is coming together, dig a little deeper and be the pace car. I have enough confidence in my inherent, natural rhythm to pull things in to the pocket with me when necessary. Fortunately I have been privileged to play with some amazing drummers and I don't often find myself in that situation.

www.amylavere.com

GEAR

70s Englehardt upright BASSES
Fishman pickups and preamp EFFECTS
Gallien-Krueger AMPS

GEAR

BASSES F-Bass BN5, Lakland 55-95, Lakland Hollowbody, Custom Kris Taylor with Aero pickups
EFFECTS Moog Taurus 3, Low Pass Filter Moogerfooger, Boss Octave OC-2, Xotic BB Distortion, 3Leaf Audio You're Doom, 3Leaf Audio Envelope Filter
AMPS Ampeg SVT Classic, 4x10 and 1x15 cabs, Demeter Tube DI

RYAN STASIK, UMPHREY'S MCGEE

I enjoy being the backbone with the rhythm section while our guitarists and keyboardist are able to create layers and textures over our grooves. We are the rock and they are the church, except sometimes I get to go to church too. Peace be with you! I learned how to play bass on a five-string. I like using the low B as an anchor for my thumb. However, I do play my four-string Lakland Hollowbody with flatwounds during acoustic, dub and reggae feel tunes. My first bass was an Ibanez Soundgear five-string. I traded my guitar, a wah pedal and some junk to my friend at a local music store in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Funny story: I was not aware that a five-string had a low B-string, ergo I tuned the bass to a high C. The neck warped and I learned the hard way about the low B. I am a self-taught bass player and this was my first lesson. D'oh! My favourite bass ever to date is my current F-Bass BN5. Although I was fortunate enough to actually play Jaco's rebuilt Bass of Doom for a minute. It was a moment I will never forget. My bass heroes are Oteil Burbidge, Stuart Zender, Derek Smalls, Cliff Burton, Tom Jenkison (Squarepusher), Tim Lefebvre, Jaco and Felix Pastorius, Mike Bendy and Steve Harris.

www.umphreys.com

ANDY CICHON

Billy Joel / Shania Twain / Shotgun Wedding

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NEW! SVT-212AV

IT'S STILL ROCK AND ROLL TO ME

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ASK JEFF

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JEFF BERLIN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS ON BASS-RELATED MATTERS. WHY NOT CONTACT JEFF TODAY?

Hello Jeff. I want to learn how to play with more dynamics. Can you help?
Steve

Hello Steve! Your question interests me because I have heard from other players asking how to learn how to play dynamically. I do have an answer for you, but it will sound strange. Here it is: don't worry about it! Problems with dynamics are a false issue. No one has a problem playing dynamically, not until bass players were told that they do. Having a problem with dynamics is a myth.

I receive questions from players all the time asking what they should do to solve certain playing problems that they don't actually have. The only real solution is to practise music and play often. Music content guides one's fingers to the correct frets on their instrument and playing solves every other issue of music that can't be solved in a music lessons. There are no other remedies to the problems that so many players are preoccupied with.

Dynamics in bass playing has never been a problem, and has rarely been discussed. When music isn't taught, then other subjects have to be addressed in lessons. Educators have invented musical obstacles for students to improve in, not deliberately as a point of subterfuge, but because educators needed something to teach. Ironically, the problems that they came up with actually never existed as real problems in the bass community in the first place.

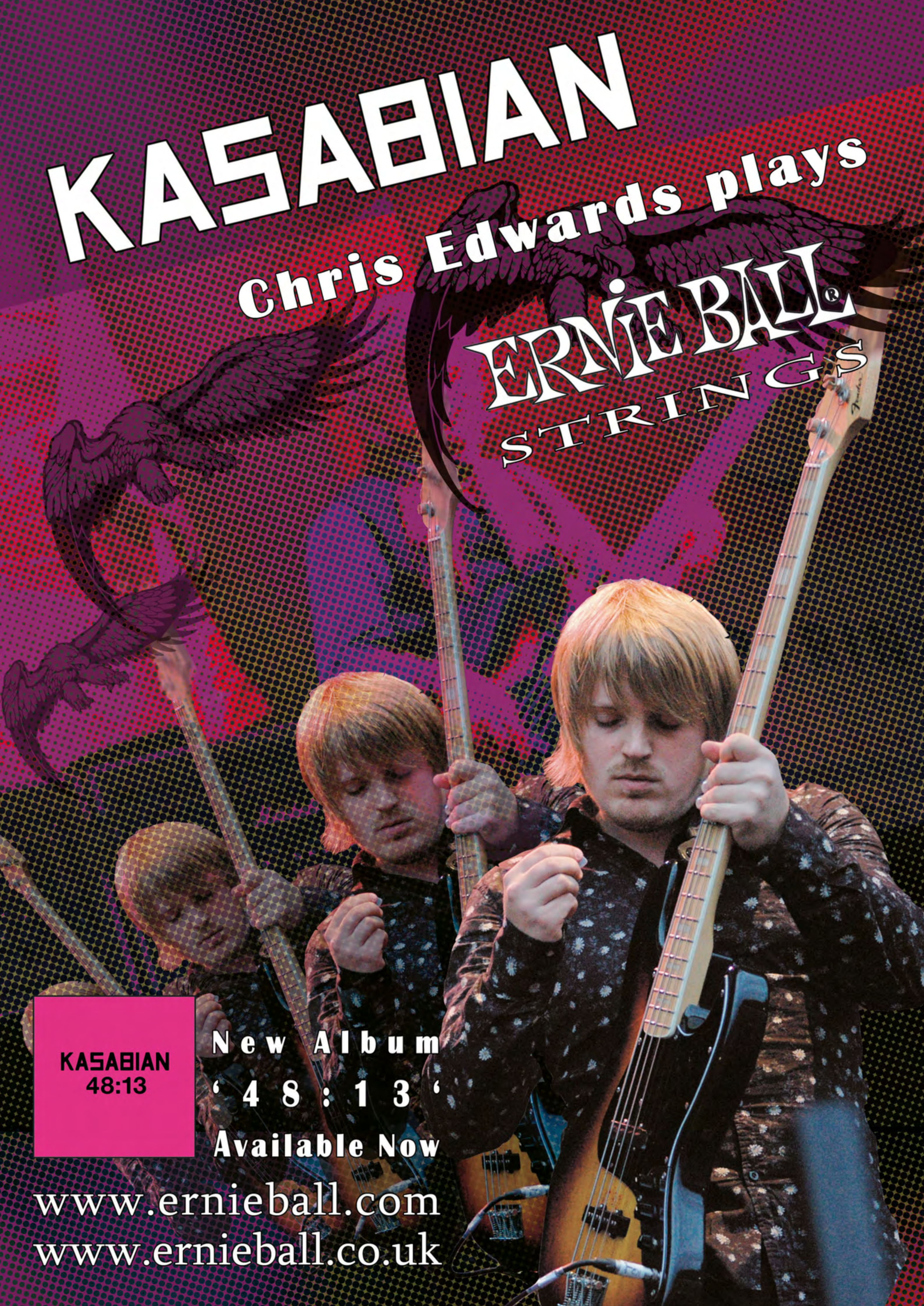
Dynamics is a silly point of consideration. Anyone with even half an ear can tell when they are either too loud or too soft, and will certainly have the musical sensibility to adjust their dynamics to fit those of the group they are playing with. It is simply obvious if one is playing insensitively: experience should fix this. It has been like this with musicians on all instruments since forever. Everyone, without exception, has passed through a period of playing where everything wrong is organically noticed and dealt with. Just go to any early recording of any artist and compare it with a later one to hear this for yourself.

This generation of bass players has only one problem that I can see, and it is a doozy! They believe what they are told are the bass problems to solve. Here is proof. The single most focused element in the life of a bass player is his groove. Why? Because teachers and players tell you that you need to work on this.

Generally, solving playing problems in education is putting the cart before the horse. Look around to see this for yourselves. Bass education focuses on rock, studio playing, locking with drummers, and grooving, but rarely focuses on music that will teach you how to play your instrument first. Most of the UK's bass community has a problem finding good musical instruction. It is there, but you really have to look for it. It is harder and harder to find dedicated, musically motivated electric bass teachers in your country. Right now, I know of three good ones: Joe Porter who lives in Guilford, Phil Mann who lives in London, and Zoltan Dekany who lives in Leeds. These three guys are fully dedicated to musical content and would be good guys to seek out. If I find more names, I will share them with you.

Learn well, play a lot and allow yourself to pass through the apprenticeship period that all players need to pass through to become better players. Everyone else did! This method works. And forget about dynamics. You don't have a problem with dynamics.

If you have a question that you'd like answered – about bass, please – why not email Jeff Berlin at talkingbassnotes@yahoo.com, or if you prefer you can post your question at www.facebook.com/bassguitarmagazine. Your question and Jeff's answer may appear in the next issue. What are you waiting for?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THE MU PAGE

THE MUSICIANS' UNION ADVISES YOU ON GETTING THAT ACOUSTIC BASS OUT FOR A SPOT OF BUSKING

Busking can be a great way to earn a few extra quid and brush up your repertoire. It's not as easy as just turning up, but if you receive positive feedback from largely indifferent audiences then you can honestly say that you're doing something right.

CHECK BEFORE YOU PLAY

It pays to check the rules with your local authority before you set out. Many areas have restrictions on whether buskers can play. In some places, you must register before you can set up. Manchester's Trafford Council maintains that buskers do not need a licence to perform in its streets, while the neighbouring Manchester City Council makes it clear that buskers should contact them well in advance of when they want to perform.

Meanwhile, the attitude of Transport For London (TFL) sits somewhere between these two extremes. To busk on the tube, you first need to join a waiting list, then pass an audition to prove your musical ability and undergo a police background check. You are then able to book busking pitches. Some local authorities also require proof of Public Liability Insurance (PLI) before you can perform. Thankfully, that's not an issue for MU members who get £10million PLI with their Union membership.

SELLING YOUR PRODUCT

Another sticking point is money – voluntary contributions or selling CDs – and rules on this vary from place to place.

"I think selling CDs or asking for a voluntary contribution is secondary to the main business of busking – the interaction with the people on the streets. Making available your own product doesn't have to be seen as a sale, it could be seen as advertising. That's what we're working towards in Liverpool," says Morris Stemp, regional organiser for the north of England. MU members are advised to contact their regional office to find out the rules where they are.

TUNE IN WITH YOUR SURROUNDINGS

"When it comes to busking successfully, it's really important to be aware of your surroundings," says Alex Mann, regional officer for London. "This is about how your musical repertoire, instrumentation and overall sound fit in with the environment you're playing in. It's good to think about things like avoiding too much repetition in your set, taking regular breaks, not being too loud and particularly setting up your pitch with consideration for the public".

Morris agrees: "I think the most important thing about busking is dialogue with the people around you, because if you introduce yourself to the people around you before you start, they are much more likely to be on your side. If they're not happy, many businesses make their first port of call their local authority or police, whereas if you're approachable then the dialogue should be with you."

Rules around busking vary significantly across the UK. Members considering busking should contact their regional office for more information. The MU is currently working with local authorities on creating best practice guidelines for buskers for the benefit of musicians, councils and local communities.

The Musicians' Union (MU) represents 30,000 musicians working across all areas of the music industry. The MU is supporting the #BackBusking campaign. If you feel busking makes a positive contribution to where you live, let us know by tweeting using the hashtag #BackBusking.

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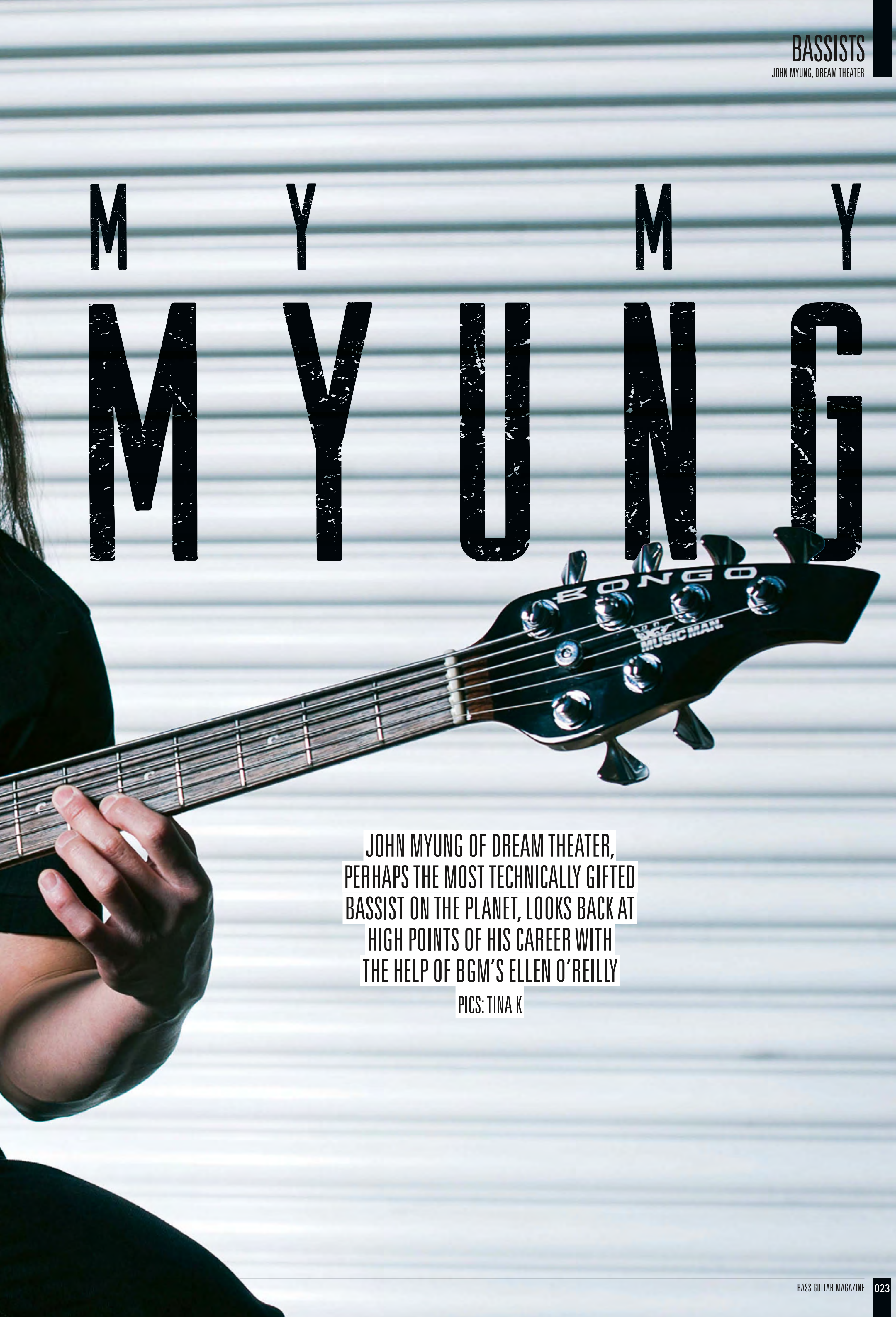


JOHN MYUNG OF DREAM THEATER, PERHAPS THE MOST TECHNICALLY GIFTED BASSIST ON THE PLANET, LOOKS BACK AT HIGH POINTS OF HIS CAREER WITH THE HELP OF BGM'S ELLEN O'REILLY

PICS: TINA K

When it comes to technical chops and inventive bass-lines, Dream Theater low-ender John Myung is the king. As a founding member of one of the most successful progressive metal bands in the world, Myung has become renowned for the jaw-dropping techniques he employs in his band, complemented by the incredible skills of his fellow musicians James Labrie (vocals) John Petrucci (guitar), Jordan Rudess (keyboards) and Mike Mangini (drums). If there's anything that Myung doesn't know about bass, we'd like to hear it...

Hailing from Chicago, Myung formed Dream Theater with Petrucci and former drummer Mike Portnoy while studying at the world-renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston. His bass-lines are incredibly challenging, while also demonstrating his keen sense of time, groove and harmony. He's been in these hallowed pages before, of course, so this time *BGM* has settled on a slightly different approach. Instead of going through Myung's life story, I've rifled through my Dream Theater back catalogue to pick 10 of my favourite Myung bass parts before heading off to meet the softly spoken bass god at London's Wembley Arena.

1 Metropolis Part I: The Miracle And The Sleeper
(from *Images And Words,* 1992)

First up, we listen to Myung's shredding, two-hand tapping segment in this song, which blazes in at around 5'30". I couldn't help but wonder what note choices he made when coming up with such a line, and the creative process behind it.

"Well, that's just going up a G major scale starting on the seventh, and it's just a root-fifth, very basic sort of pattern, but the energy of the song led to a moment where everyone looked at me and said it was time for a bass solo. I had to do something, and I just started tapping away and it was a real neat pattern that my hands fell into. I'm not really a solo player: I play because I like playing with other musicians. I don't necessarily like playing by myself, but, in the context of a song with the band, that's the perfect example of people pushing you more than you would normally do. That's what I love about being in a band, we all support each other, push each other."

> " I'M NOT REALLY A SOLO PLAYER. I PLAY BECAUSE I LIKE PLAYING WITH OTHER MUSICIANS. I DON'T LIKE PLAYING BY MYSELF "

The speed and accuracy with which Myung plays the line leads me to ask how he achieves such an even tone and volume. Is there much compression involved?

"In the studio there's just so much processing going on, apart from the equipment that I normally use. What I use doesn't actually sound like my equipment once it's filtered through all the presets in the studio. The engineers have a certain way of wiring: they'll pass the bass through a piece of gear, like a classic unit-type compression, and I'll ask them 'Why are you doing that, because it's not doing anything?' Then they'll say, 'We're doing it because we like the way it colours the sound'. As for the evenness, compression will handle a lot of that, but it's part performance, part studio gear. You have to make sure that your hands are strong enough to be able to carry the part better. Another important thing is getting used to playing with higher action: when I practise at home, or when I'm recording in the studio, I tend to have things set a little bit more comfortably, but when I'm playing live it works against you because you have to bring everything up a notch. One of the best ways to do that is to raise your action, because it gives the strings more room to vibrate, so the instrument naturally becomes louder. Being able to play and practise with a bit of a higher action than you're normally accustomed to, that's when you really have to work at something."

2 The Ytse Jam
(from *When Dream And Day Unite,* 1989)

Arguably one of Dream Theater's most iconic instrumental tracks, this song boasts many tasty licks, but it's the bass solo at 3'32" that stands out. I ask John if he had planned that solo, or if it had been a case of flying by the seat of his pants.

"Oh wow! Yeah, that was a real high-energy part: sometimes you just have to come and play with as much fire as you can from the first note. That was a series of things that I was practising at the time, hammer-ons and scale stuff. That was me attempting to be like Eddie Van Halen or something, sort of being challenged and playing whatever came to mind. It was improvised but then it became the part. That was the first record and being in the studio, working with producers, everything was new. I remember using a little bit more distortion: the characteristics of the bass really change when you have a lot of overdrive. You have a little bit more freedom to do legato and long stuff that really cuts through. That was a spur-of-the-moment thing."

As Myung is a former student of Berklee, I wonder how his studies affected his approach to improvising.

"My education at Berklee was very brief: we were only there for a year. I got most of what I learned from listening to recordings and meeting people. I was the big Iron Maiden fan and I still am. Rush and Yes had me up playing bass until two o'clock in the morning trying to figure stuff out. They played that key role in making me want to be a player and be in a band. A lot of things that Berklee encouraged us to do were really positive, but it wasn't necessarily something that had a direct infusion into what I was doing. It was providing good history and structure in terms of classical and jazz standard arrangements and ways of creating harmony, so they challenged you to do things, which was good – but the most I got out of school was the musicians that I met. So many incredible people from all over the world, there were people into punk, jazz, classical and rock. You slipped into a really cool musical culture, it was a mind-opening experience. I was just a kid from the suburbs and then there were all these really great players into all sorts of different music."

3 Scarred
(from *Awake,* 1994)

The intro of 'Scarred' is a wonderful example of Myung's sense of groove and sets the tone for this epic track.

"I remember being in New York City after two years of touring off *Images And Words*, and I remember there being a lot of pressure because that album had been so successful. That was just me, John and Mike working stuff out and it turned out to be a really cool song. I was really into bands like The Cure back then, and I think it was just a combination of what I was hearing and the vibe that was present. Music's like that, you don't really plan it. I don't tend to use a whole lot of effects, only if the part really calls for it. It's always gotten in the way of a bass being a bass, with all the processing and stuff

GEAR

ALSO FOUND IN MYUNG'S SONIC ARMOURY...

Demeter preamps, DI box and compressor

Ashdown preamps and power amps

MesaBoogie amplifiers

MXR compressors

Fractal Audio AXE effects

that goes on, you need the bass to be this pure tone. I recorded that with a Tung bass back then. For me, tapping is a real natural thing, and a lot of guys developed it like Billy Sheehan. There's a lot of jazz improvisation where you can do lots of root melody things, so I was borrowing from that."

4 New Millennium
(from *Falling To Infinity*, 1997)

Not only is John Myung a bass beast, he has also ventured into the world of the Chapman Stick. On 'New Millennium', Myung tests out his two-hand tapping on this most intimidating of instruments.

"I always wanted a Chapman Stick. There's so many different ways to play that instrument because it has a 12-string range. To keep things simple I wanted to use it only as a bass, so I was playing towards the lower range of the instrument and trying to come up with a pattern. That was just a functional pattern that had a nice groove to it. That was me, Mike and Derek [Sherinian, keyboards] trying to find out where the bass-line was in this thing we were working on. There's not a whole lot of processing going on, that's pretty much the way it sounds. It's like the ultimate bass guitar: the low end has this real special sound, with the way the pickups are configured. It has this really round tone and this middle attack for tapping: it's like a touchboard instrument. A bass guitar ascends in fourths whereas that instrument ascends in fifths, so it's a little different. I have memories of being overwhelmed by the Stick at first because there are so many different possibilities: if I was to use it again that would still be my mentality, to use it as a bass. Once you have it in your hands, try to forget everything technical about it and just try to come up with something."

" I LOVE SONGS THAT START WHERE IT'S JUST A FEEL, AND YOU WORK ON IT AS A BAND "

5 Lifting Shadows Off a Dream
(from *Awake*, 1994)

Check out the beautiful bass intro!

"I love songs that start where it's just a feel, and you work on it as a band. I don't think everyone was at the studio yet: I had gotten there early and I was playing this part and figuring it out and Kevin [Moore, keyboardist] just started playing this line. I was like, 'Oh my God, what are you playing? That sounds incredible!' and we developed it as a band and it became a really cool song. The beauty to that part is totally unique to the six-string. It's utilising the full range of the instrument: I'm playing low B and then a higher B off the A string and then I'm playing harmonics off the high C and creating this B to G root motion, and that with the keyboard really takes off."

6 A Change Of Seasons, III. Carpe Diem
(from *A Change Of Seasons*, 1995)

Over 23 minutes in length, 'A Change Of Seasons' has a lot to offer for prog bass fans. We checked out two particularly tasty bass moments: first is the bass solo at 9'06".

"It's weird listening to music like that because it puts me right back where I was when it was happening! Half the time we were writing, and half the time we were doing pre-production for a tour. When I was going through the initial line, I was thinking Chris Squire, a Yes sort of bass-line. He has a cool way of creating these really melodic bass parts. I was doing a Squire impression and complementing John's guitar part, creating a short but melodic part to bring us into the next section."

7 A Change Of Seasons, IV. The Darkness Of Winter
(from *A Change Of Seasons*, 1995)

Listen to the blistering unison riffage at 12'18".

"I'm just following what the guitar is doing. John comes up with these really intense patterns, and this was one of those things where he'll show me what he's doing and I'll work it up to speed. You can get a lot of mileage from using three fingers rather than just two. I go back and forth between the two depending on how the part sounds. If you play with two fingers it can be difficult, but with the third finger it's actually a more fluid motion and it's actually not that hard. Notice how when you're actually about to play, the way you normally rest on the strings they become even. The physics of it actually work in favour of using three fingers. I think it's just a case of finding out what your comfort zone is, I think you can get a unique attack with two, where you utilise your middle finger, but in terms of trying to play something that demands more fluidity, you can incorporate the third finger and work that into your technique."

8 The Glass Prison
(from *Six Degrees Of Inner Turbulence*, 2002)

Many readers will have heard the bass-led opening to 'The Glass Prison', comprising a haunting chordal sequence that eases into a much heavier song.

"This brings me right back to Bear Track Studios in New York. It was me and John, just working on something together. With me it always starts with a feeling: I remember showing it to John and he was playing it on his guitar. He organised it a little bit differently by putting a low B behind it and that's when the part developed and he said 'You play the B and I'll play the chordal part and add a harmonic'. It reminded me of something that Megadeth would do. It started as a cool melody and we applied it to how it would play out across a guitar, and that's when it started gaining a little bit more structure. We locked on that journey which became 'The Glass Prison'."

9 Enigma Machine
(from *Dream Theater*, 2013)

Dream Theater's most recent release was their self-titled 2013 album, the first to involve new drummer Mike Mangini in the creative process. The instrumental 'Enigma Machine' boasts some amazing interplay between the guitar and bass at 1'40".

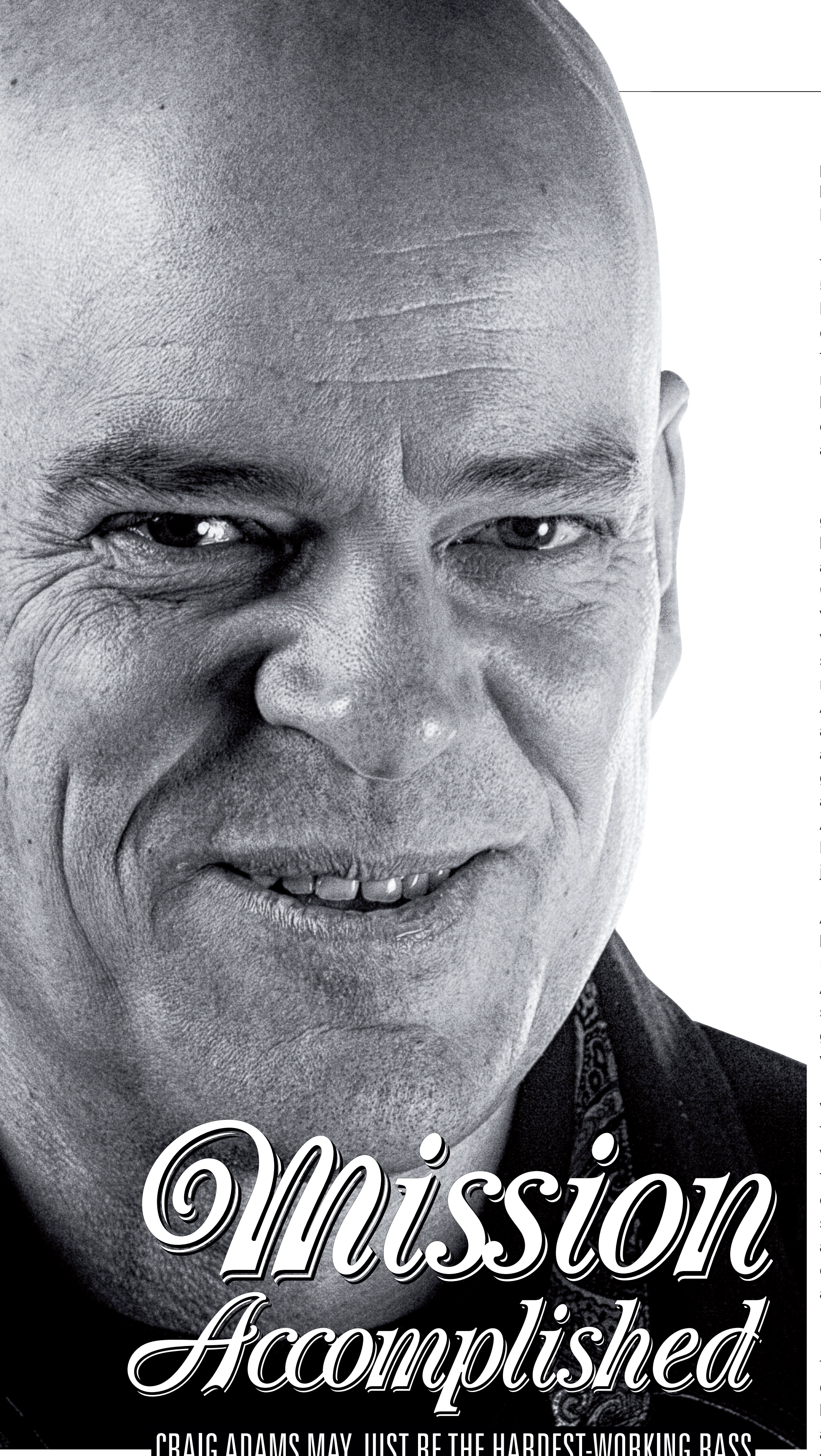
"That was one of those really crazy busy sections. When we were trying to glue that part together, we found the pulse of the song and seeing where that pulse would align with what John and Jordan were playing. Working with that foundation to build the part, they would play the line and I would keep track of time. That took a little bit more time to write, because you have to be patient – or at least John and Jordan would have to be patient, be cause they would play something and I'd be like 'Stop, go back' and that's when we really had to take our time and find out exactly what is happening. I can't play in an arbitrary way, it has to synchronise with what they're playing. That was one of those labour-intensive parts, when you're trying to find what the bass part should be, finding it out note for note. You have to figure out what's going on, then you have to learn the part and internalise it."

10 Surrender To Reason
(from *Dream Theater*, 2013)

The final track we listened to was also from the new album, featuring lyrics written by Myung and a retro bass-line at 1'39".

"That was the first song that came together on the new album. We were going into the guitar solo phase and John was like, 'OK John, play the best bass-line you can think of'. We were revisiting a lot of our older

influences at the time, and I thought of 'Working Man' by Rush and the way Geddy Lee would break into that. That part was also heavily influenced by the sound I was getting: the tone that you're hearing was my writing sound. Sound is so important: if the sound resonates with you musically from the get-go, then it can push you and inspire you to do things. The best lines are the ones that aren't too busy, they're sort of repetitive but driving. I was connecting with something I had heard and a record that I had grown up with. That was the relationship I had with that part: sometimes you don't know if it's good or not, but after coming away from it I'm happy with it."



Mission Accomplished

CRAIG ADAMS MAY JUST BE THE HARDEST-WORKING BASS PLAYER IN MERRIE ENGLAND, PLAYING FOR NOT ONE BUT FOUR HIGH-PROFILE ROCK BANDS. JOEL MCIVER MEETS THE UNSTOPPABLE MAN

"I'm doing some bass stuff for a guy in New York," says Craig Adams. "I'm constantly on the go with different projects... I think that's the way of the world now."

We agree entirely, but that said, few of us have the stamina to match Adams' current membership of the Mission, the Alarm, Spear Of Destiny and Theatre Of Hate. If these were indie bands playing at your local Dog & Duck we'd understand, but all four are bona fide rock phenomena with a high-profile touring schedule. Phew...

As Adams explains, it takes reliable gear to get the job done on time, saying: "Ampeg did a run of 500 numbered SVT reissues in the mid-80s and I had two of them, but one exploded. I've recorded everything with the other one since then. It goes in for repairs occasionally: I think the last time it cost me about 500 quid, but it was worth doing. As for basses, I've got a couple of 1977 Thunderbirds, an old Fender and a Rickenbacker. I used a Schecter on a couple of tracks on the new Mission album, *The Brightest Light*, as well."

Adams is gradually recovering from a vintage gear obsession, he tells us. "I have all these old basses but I'm starting to find that new ones are really good as well. I recently bought a new Gretsch, which is really nice: they're so tough, you can throw them downstairs. A while back I was working with a guy in Japan who had done some production with Nine Inch Nails, and he told me that Mexican Fenders sound just as good as American-made ones, so I try not to get too anal about basses... Anyway, flying your favourite gear around these days is risky because so much stuff gets lost. Usually I just ask for a P-Bass or a Jazz and whatever turns up, turns up. I always ask for Ampeg and sometimes I get an amp I've never heard of! But you've travelled thousands of miles, just get on with it."

Asked about his frankly intimidating workload, Adams explains: "The Mission did an American tour back in September 2013, then I came back to the UK and did Spear Of Destiny all through October. After that I couldn't do a couple of Theatre Of Hate shows because they clashed with some Mission gigs, and then I did the Alarm in the spring. Then it was back to Spear again. It's nice to be wanted..."

As old goths will remember, Adams' career goes way back, further than any of his current bands. His first major gig was the Sisters Of Mercy, where he was a member from 1981 to 1985. Asked about this increasingly far-off era, Adams tells us: "I'm originally a keyboard player. When I met [Sisters singer] Andrew Eldritch, they were looking for a bass player, so I said I could play bass. I had a couple of riffs and a fuzzbox and got through the audition. It came fairly naturally after that, although I'm still terrible at scales and whatever."

"I can't remember a great deal about my time with the Sisters, to be honest," he adds diplomatically, which is probably just as well because various legal shenanigans went on for ages between the Sisters and the Mission, for which we have no space here. The Mission also knew how to party, by all accounts, although Adams swerves that issue too, laughing: "I don't know anything about that... I'll plead the Fifth. We had our moments, shall we say. We're a bit calmer now and we don't argue as much; there are a lot more compromises. We've just done three nights in Bristol and played loads of new stuff and we had a blast. We really had a good time... We were like a bunch of 13-year-olds back then, but it's different now because hangovers hurt a lot more!"

***The Brightest Light* is out now.**
Info: www.themissionuk.com

Brujeria

JEFF WALKER OF CARCASS HAS THE TRICKY TASK OF DELIVERING BASS AND VOCALS IN ONE OF THE HEAVIEST BANDS ON THE PLANET. JOEL MCIVER FINDS OUT HOW HE DOES IT . . .

BODY TALK

Classic rock bands reunite all the time these days, but it was a special day for the headbangers of the world in 2007 when Carcass, possibly this country's finest ever extreme metal band, announced that they would be touring once more after 12 years on hiatus. A new album called *Surgical Steel* followed last year, recorded with two of the original line-up – singer/bassist Jeff Walker and Bill Steer – plus newbies Ben Ash (guitar) and Dan Wilding (drums). The album was a worldwide hit, high-profile tours followed and all in all the sometime underground grindcore quartet are doing rather splendidly, better in fact than they did in their first period of activity from 1985 to 1995.

"What a vulgar question!" remarks Walker laconically when, in true tabloid style, I ask him if Carcass make more money now than used to. "Yeah, we do. We made a living back then, but Carcass is bigger now. That said, my lifestyle is quite modest: I don't have gold-plated taps or anything. As long as I've got money in my pocket for a curry once in a while, I'm happy."

Asked what he did with himself while Carcass were on hold, Walker explains: "I joined civvy life! I always likened being in a band to being in the army, so effectively I was demobbed. It was a retirement, basically. I'd done everything I wanted to do, musically, so I worked for the civil service."

While Walker did release a 2006 solo album, the tongue-in-cheek *Welcome To Carcass Cuntry*, and Steer formed the blues-rock band Firebird, their profile was relatively low-key until Carcass returned, when Walker bagged himself a tasty custom bass. As he recalls, "I had a cheap LTD that ESP gave me when I was in their warehouse in LA once, and I used that for the reunion gigs, but since 2010 or thereabouts I've been using a couple of custom guitars that Fernandes made for me."

He adds: "It's a Les Paul meets a Thunderbird. Fernandes agreed to design a guitar based on my own daft ideas. It's called the Triturador, which means 'grinder' in Spanish. I've got four of them – a black one, a white one and a couple of prototypes. EMG kindly gave me some colour-coded pickups, some one-off cream models that they made. It's a production model but I'm not sure if they've ever got around to making one available. I also play in [legendary Mexican-American death metal band] Brujeria, and I use the white one for that."

See Carcass play and you'll notice that their songs (or those from the band's later albums, anyway) are complex and melodic as well as unnervingly heavy, requiring a precise touch from the musicians. Perhaps this explains why gear tends to enjoy a reasonably lifespan in Carcass... "I never have any problems with basses," reflects Walker. "I've only ever broken one string in my life, in Paris back in 1993 or something. We don't take much gear out anyway, so the guitars tend not to get smashed up by baggage handlers and whoever. Let's be brutally honest, with the state of air travel nowadays, it's expensive to travel with a lot of guitars. In the old days you could go to the States with two basses, a suitcase and an extra bag of crap and you just can't do that any more. You've got to be economical with the amount of gear that you travel with. Back in the day an extra bass was necessary, because we tune to B and a five-string made life easier for me because of its intonation, but to be honest our guitars just don't seem to have tuning issues. Bill uses vintage Les Pauls, for instance, but they handle drop tuning really well."

Check the interweb and you'll see pictures of Walker wielding various basses over the years. He lays it out for us: "I got an acoustic guitar for Christmas when I was about nine years old, and I tried to learn it, but like every bass player I worked out that it was easier to hit one string than six. The first bass I got belonged to the Electro Hippies' old bass player: I joined them in 1986, when I was about 16. The singer asked if I could play the bass, and because I could play the guitar, I could play bass a bit too. That bass was an Avon Precision copy, and then I got a Westone Thunder, which got stolen. After that I got an Aria Pro five-string, which I used until about 1992 when I got an Ibanez, which I sold to Dave Pybus of Cradle Of Filth. Then Ibanez gave me an endorsement deal and I played an RG."

Readers of the headbanging persuasion (and you wouldn't have read this far if you weren't, be honest) will be amused to hear that at one point Walker used the most un-heavy metal bass of all. "I used a Steinberger on [Carcass's 1996 farewell album] *Swansong*, the one with the body. What was really disconcerting about it was the lack of headstock, which really put me off, so we had to make a headstock out of cardboard. I stuck it on the end. Really! It sounds dumb, but otherwise you get to the end of the neck and you get lost. It really put me off. Anyway the Steinberger sounded fantastic, and it was easy to keep in tune because of the double ball-ended strings."

A question that we have to ask is how Walker pulls off the fantastically difficult tremolo picking that Carcass requires, night after night, especially coupled with his awe-inspiring shrieked vocals. He shrugs and explains: "Most of the time I'm just following the guitar, but I have to simplify the parts because Bill is very fast and dexterous and I'm not! But I like simple bass parts anyway. The bass is there to give the bottom end: I'm not a fan of virtuoso bass players because if you play too fast you lose that sound. Live it's a trade-off between vocals and bass. You have to compromise."

He continues: "I've always liked bands where you can hear the bass, like Rudimentary Peni or Hüsker Dü. I don't have bass heroes as such, like I have their poster on the wall or whatever, but of course Phil Lynott was a fantastic player, writer and personality. Billy Gould of Faith No More is fantastic. Duff McKagan too, I've always enjoyed his playing. What matters to me is the song, not just soloing. I used to play high on the neck a bit when I was younger, but I try to keep it simple and focus on the vocals nowadays. I'm very meat and potatoes."

Looking back across Walker's career, certain high points stand out because they represented such a difference from the usual heavy metal cliches. One was Carcass's 1996 remix of 'Isobel' by Icelandic singer Björk, which she famously disliked: as Walker recalls, "Her A&R guy seemed impressed, but from what I heard Björk didn't want that song remixed because it was personal to her. That was all done in the pre-Pro-Tools era, with everything played to tape rather than being sequenced. We really liked it... it's a pity she didn't!"

Asked about his band's future, Walker reasons: "We'll continue to do what we do. We have our own audience: the *Surgical Steel* album wasn't an attempt to be commercial. We do this for ourselves and to show our fanbase that we can still do it. We could have continued as a nostalgia act, playing the old songs on the circuit, but we wanted to at least seem relevant."

Refreshingly, he's sanguine about his bass skills: when we ask him how he's evolved as a bassist, he chuckles: "I've devolved! I was a much keener player when I was younger, but I know what my role is. I complement the rest of the band and I keep the bottom end. I tried to show off and be clever when I was younger, but there really isn't room for that in the band now." Hats off, that man.

Info: www.facebook.com/officialcarcass

Andy Man

ANDY IRVINE IS A BASSIST, EDUCATOR, CLINICIAN FOR WARWICK AND MAN OF WISDOM WHEN IT COMES TO THE BASS WORLD. HERE THE GREAT MAN WRITES FOR BGM ON THE SUBJECT OF PLAYING FAST AND FUNKY.

PICS BY TINA K

In its essence and truest form, funky music is simple. It's the careful weaving of rhythmic patterns, using syncopation by all the instruments in the group, which together form a musical fabric that is stronger than its individual parts. It relies heavily on emphasising the almighty one, the first beat of each measure.

So let's start with the bass. The slapping and popping style invented by Larry Graham is often what people think of first when the idea of funk comes to mind. Although this was one of the key elements in the evolution of funk, it is not in fact what defines it. There are thousands of funky songs and grooves in which the bassist never slaps or pops a string once. Slap bass tends to have a bad rap due to one of the following three failures…

A bassist decides one day that he or she wants to be funky, and with only a small amount of practice, on the next gig or rehearsal tries to execute this technique and blows it. It's like a gymnast who, rather than executing a well-planned routine with precision timing and graceful execution, staggers across the mat and, on reaching the other side, falls flat on his face.

The self-professed funky bassist tries to force the slap technique into a style of music where it does not belong. This takes the entire vibe of the music out of context and the groove is lost.

Without investing time in learning and developing the technique, the bassist simply slaps and plucks way too hard, way too loud, and loses the bottom.

How to solve these problems? Timing and tone, in that order, are the two most important factors here: both should be carefully and slowly developed to a point of confident and consistent delivery, if any bassist wishes to bring this style into a useful and musical context. But funky music does not only rely on the bassist's ability to execute with discipline, it also falls on each and every other instrument in the band.

I'm always most satisfied and entertained when I hear an excellent rhythm guitarist. Listening to even

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the highest calibre, virtuoso guitar player solo on and on often begins to sound like the school teacher in the Peanuts cartoon after eight measures. This is not to say that guitar solos can't be engaging and interesting, but for me, the wailing of the Marshall and long-winded guitar ramblings drive me nuts.

Then there's the drummer. He or she is in fact the leader of the band – of all bands – at all times. Sure, others might be the frontman, star or whatever, but from the point of counting off the song the drummer is leading the band and he or she determines if it will or will not be funky. The earliest funk drumming was quite simple and then began to take on some hip syncopation which makes the 'feel' of the music swing, bounce, strut, and swagger. James Brown is the undisputed inventor of funk and he instructed his drummers carefully to play in the ways he felt and heard his music.

The drummer that I recommend most to bassists for getting an introduction to funky, pocket-style playing is Clyde Stubblefield. The horns play a huge role as well, with tight crisp lines, stabs, and accents, that are either in rhythmic unison, syncopated, harmonised, and many other combinations thereof. The JBs of course are the funkiest of all the horn section pioneers, and the unit that should be listened to most closely to gain some insight.

The B3 organ is a funk soul machine and, if operated by the right cat, is the glue that bubbles within the funky fabric, creates textural layers, and sways and swells with its soulful timbre. It is the combination of all these elements that creates the funky fabric. It requires discipline on all levels and at every musical station of the bandstand to lock in and hold down a stone-cold groove. When the groove is there and deeply established, there really is no need to go anywhere. It takes on a trance-like feeling that makes people have to move their bodies. It's magic – so simple and yet so perfectly complex.

Soul, funk, R&B, rock and pop all have elements of the funkiness I'm talking about. Even country music! For example, the chicken-pickin' guitar style of cats like Albert Lee and more modern players like Brent Mason are downright funky in the placement and rhythmic execution of their lines and solos. Dig in and do some listening, and some practising.

Bassists, if you are going to attempt to put in some slap lines, you had better have it together, with swift and confident control – otherwise you will find yourself in a position not unlike having your pants pulled down on national TV, plus you'll have to face the wrath of your bandmembers. There needs to be a deep bounce and swing to the feel, dripping with soul, and when everyone in the group comes together for the collective groove it's total dynamite. But it only takes one jive turkey to blow it and it's game over.

MULTIMEDIA MAN

In between touring the globe with his popular Warwick Sound Of Bass workshop, Andy Irvine is releasing an educational DVD called *Joyful Musicianship: Mechanics And Mindset* and an autobiography, *Passion And Action: A Musician's Journey*, later this year. **Info: www.andyirvinebass.com**

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MAN O' WAR(WICK)

WITH HIS ENIGMATIC, EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC, JONAS HELLBORG OFFERS HIDDEN DELIGHTS FOR ANY BASS FAN. MIKE BROOKS MET THE MAN FOR A CHAT ABOUT LIFE AT THE LOW END

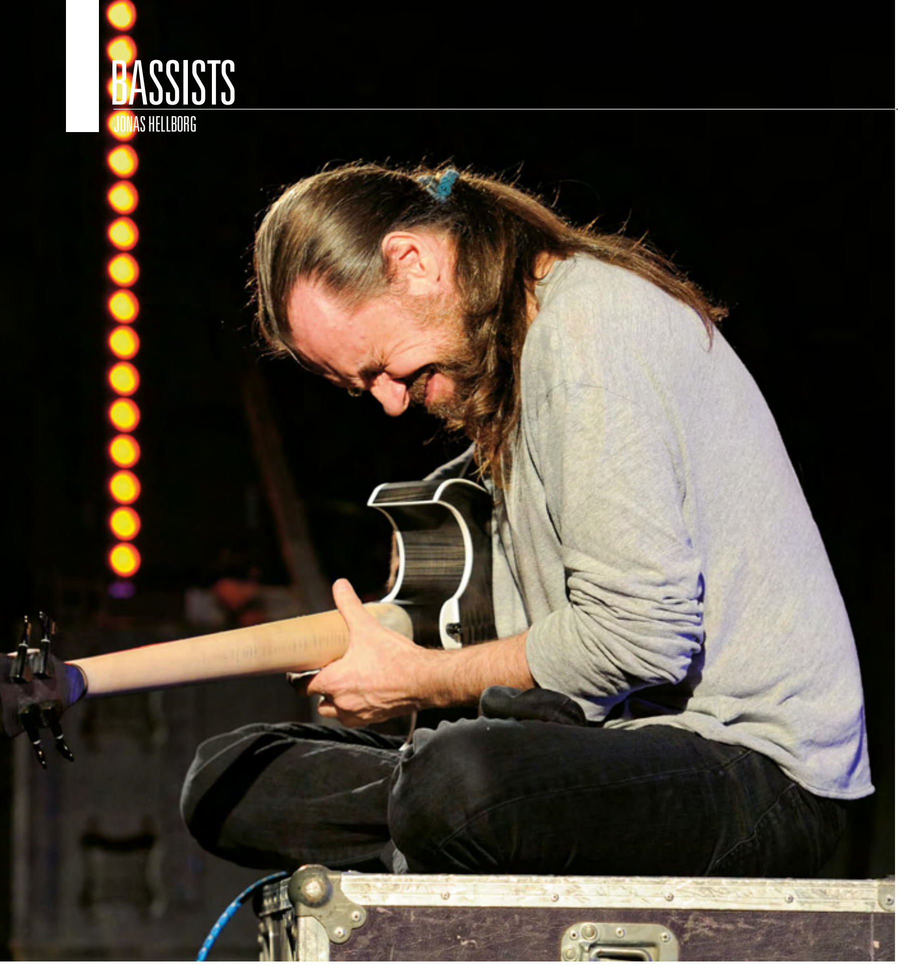
PICS BY TINA K

Widely regarded and acclaimed for his solo work and his extensive career, including stints with John McLaughlin & the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Jonas Hellborg brings a spirituality to his performances and conveys a tangible empathy with his Warwick Hellborg Signature electro-acoustic bass. Over the course of his career so far, Hellborg has embraced a varied selection of top-end instruments, from Wal doublenecks to a Status model that boasted a 36-volt preamp. When choosing an instrument, does he have specific requirements that drive him towards a particular brand or model, such as comfort or visuals, or can a change in direction or sound be the driving force?

"In general, we have these ideas that we are going for an instrument that has a particular sound or 'I will only get that sound with a specific bass with these features' but in the end, it all sounds the same. When I play a bass, and I've listened back to recordings I did 30 years ago, I say 'Wait a minute, that sounds how I sound now!' The key is that to be comfortable, despite the illusion of what you think you have to have, and that the instrument does not distract you, or detract from what you are trying to do. Any instrument is a vehicle for getting out the ideas and emotions inside you: the processes between your ears and your brain compensate for everything that happens in between. When you get used to something, you think it is better than something else. It's like food: if you eat something for a period of time, you'll think it is better than something else."

As Hellborg's career has progressed, there has been a definite shift away from electric basses to acoustic and electro-acoustic instruments. Were his electric instruments of choice detracting from what he wanted to do? "No, sometime in the 80s, I realised that what I wanted to do with an electric bass was make it sound like an acoustic bass guitar, even though they didn't really exist back then. There were some Ernie Ball basses and the Mexican full-bodied instruments, but when I played with McLaughlin I met Abraham Wechter, who made all of the Shakti guitars. He built me an acoustic bass guitar that is still, to this day, the best instrument I have ever played. I fell in love with it and I quit playing electric for eight or nine years, I was only doing acoustic and classical shows."

He adds, "Originally, it had internal pickups, but I tweaked it and it was so loud by itself acoustically, I didn't need any amplification for it despite playing alongside violins and cellos. It was basically a Gibson J200 body, but it was well built with great bass frequencies, truly the best acoustic bass guitar there is. I got used to this acoustic's body position because it was a lot more ergonomic and comfortable for me, I didn't feel like I was playing 'against' the instrument, so when I went back to playing electrics with Warwick, although my basses look acoustic, they have no acoustic features or acoustic influences on the sound. The sound I'm going for is acoustic anyway, the pickup I designed sounds acoustic as it has full frequency bandwidth all the way up to 20kHz. Usually you get up to 5 to 7kHz and then it rolls off, so that tends to make the sound more acoustic in terms of character. There are no controls: the pickup is hotwired to the



jack output, and there is a volume control, but it is disabled on my bass. The bass has a preamp circuit as well, so that Warwick can sell the bass to other players, but my personal basses don't have it."

For the uninitiated, Jonas teamed up with Warwick some time ago to produce a range of high-end amplification that eventually came to market back in 2008. Did Jonas develop these for a specific purpose? Was it dissatisfaction with the amplification on the market that drove him to create something new? "It was some of all of that, really," he ponders. "I've always thought that amp manufacturers have skimped on quality in order to make a profit. A lot of people involved in making amps know what is needed to make a good amp, but they don't think that people are willing to pay for it, and to a certain extent this is true. I wanted to have something that is built to the same standards as studio equipment. I felt the need for somebody to make it and put it onto the market."

He continues, "For the new Warwick LWA1000, which I have also designed, to have all the features that people want, we had to be more clever in the design. I worked a lot more on the design principles. Basically we used the same-grade components as everyone else is using but to get the headroom, to get the low noise floor and freedom from distortion within the circuit, this is important. Different tastes in amplification means you have players that want distortion – but they don't want transistor amp distortion, they want rich valve distortion. In my mind, these amps should be super-clean. I believe in these amps, not to promote them or sell them, but because I wanted to design them and make them, and I use them myself."

With the LWA1000 creating waves among the bass fraternity, will Jonas be ditching the hernia-inducing heavyweight amps in favour of the new Class D model – or are they more a response to the call of the marketplace? Naturally, Jonas has his own views. "Of course, everyone is hollering about these low-weight Class D amps but to me, they didn't sound that good until we developed the technology that we are using. I think we have done a good job with this amp by incorporating the main ideas from the existing range. So that people understand, I have no ego in this, I don't think I'm a genius – but I have some knowledge of electronics and experience in studios. I cherry-pick stuff that I like, and I know that this and that works and sounds good. The trigger for me was 'Why does my bass sound so great in the studio and then when I go to my rig it sounds so shitty'? I've been working with Celestion on these amps and they helped me out as I'm not a speaker designer. I don't know how to create boxes or speaker drivers, but there are people who do and I talk to them. They do it correctly, they are educated people. There's a right way to do something and a less right way."

As a bassist with an immense amount of ability and technique at his disposal, does Hellborg feel that he is developing? "Yes, I do, but I think it's important not to concern yourself so much with how great or not so great your playing is, it's about the amazement of this wonderful thing that is music. Then things happen and you find new things and experience new experiences. And that takes you further. You know, sometimes you don't play so great, and other times you feel really great about it and keep yourself active and looking in new directions."

With a career of almost 35 years behind him, Jonas is as busy as he's ever been – but does he still have the fire and motivation he had as a young bassist? "I have even more!" he laughs. "I can't stop, there's so much stuff I want to explore and work on. I find I have so much inspiration that there isn't enough time in the day to do it all. I think

"SOMETIME IN THE 80S, I REALISED THAT WHAT I WANTED TO DO WITH AN ELECTRIC BASS WAS MAKE IT SOUND LIKE AN ACOUSTIC BASS GUITAR"

every human being is fighting against their own laziness: that goes for everybody, it's not unique. Sometimes I'm good at pushing myself and sometimes I can be a lazy son of a bitch. I don't have any points to prove to anybody, I'm not here to push my excellent status as a musician down anybody's throat, I'm just doing something that gives me a lot of pleasure."

So how is Hellborg's schedule looking? "Two records have just been released. One is a solo record I did in the 80s called *The Silent Life*, and the other is *The Jazz Raj*, with Mattias and John McLaughlin's drummer, Ranjit Barot, and an album with percussionist V. Selvaganesh who I have worked with for a long time."

Talking to Hellborg, you get the impression that he's always been focused on what he wants to do – and if people want to follow him, that's great, but if they don't, he'll do his own thing regardless. "I can recommend it to other people," he says, "because success is one of the most dangerous things in the world. Once you're successful, people want to keep you in that position because you're a cow and they want to milk you as much as they can. Keep following your heart and don't bother with people telling you what you should do. The only way to become really successful is to do what you want to do – and be willing to fall on your face, as that is the only way you will learn. You have to fail, if you don't fail, you don't get anywhere."

Info: www.hellborg.com

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WHAT A WHEEZE

FROM TWO BASSES TO A WHOLE STACK OF GEAR, SCOTT SHRINER'S LIFE AS A BASSMAN HAS BEEN UP AND DOWN. JOE DALY MEETS THE MAN WHO KEEPS WEEZER GROUNDED

The bass player arrived on time for the audition, well aware that he looked like a roadie for Black Label Society. Shrouded in a tangle of long black hair, more tattoos than a Hell's Angels barbecue, and astonishingly, a gold tooth, he nodded to the band as he laid his case on the floor and popped it open. For a band that specialised in the type of butt-kicking rock and roll used in bar brawl montages, this musician would fit perfectly. Today's audition however, involved something quite different.

As he set up his 70s SVT rig and 1960 P-Bass, the bassist silently reminded himself to maintain the lowest of expectations. It wasn't that he didn't have the chops: quite the opposite – the guy was hell on wheels when it came to the four-string, packing years of intensive study and a profound understanding of music theory under his belt. No, his competency was not in question: the concern was that the band he was auditioning for was the alt-rock juggernaut Weezer.

The year was 2001, and at that time, not only had Weezer established their pop-rock primacy in the mainstream, but the world saw them as the guys with short hair and glasses. If the notion of a long-haired, tatted-up biker trying out for Weezer strained mathematical probability, then the notion that he might land the gig almost instantly would fall squarely in the 'mind-blowing' category. Yet that's precisely what happened.

Scott Shriner grew up in Toledo, Ohio, a city known for neither its cosmopolitan ways nor its balmy weather. The blue-collared people of Toledo love American football, hate winter and live and die according to the health of the manufacturing sector. The city itself lies worlds away from the smoky alleys of the New York jazz scene or the sun-drenched pavement of Hollywood's Sunset Strip.

While not all bassists begin with that instrument, many launch their musical odyssey with either a guitar or a set of cheap drums. Scott's journey to the four-string began a bit differently. "I played trumpet in grade school. Not a typical bass player story," he admits to *Bass Guitar Magazine* with a chuckle. "I played trumpet because my grandfather had one and it only had three buttons, so I thought it was gonna be easier."

Easygoing and quick with self-deprecating humour, Scott may be inclined to downplay his talents, but his enthusiasm for talking about music and bass guitar mastery reveals a musician who takes his job deadly seriously. Although he moved to electric guitar early in his teens, Scott failed to connect with that instrument to any measurable extent, and it was only upon hearing the ska-flavoured thump of the Police's 'Walking On The Moon' that the proverbial light illuminated. "I kept asking my dad what notes I was hearing on the radio. That was one of the first songs I heard on the radio that was very bass-driven – those big, long, huge notes with the chorus. It sounds beautiful to me. He said that was the bass and I knew that was what I wanted to play. The low end was speaking to me at that time."

While Sting opened the door to the possibilities of the bass, like many fledgling bassists of his time, Scott eventually made his way to Black Sabbath. "They were the next band where I was kind of really drawn to the bass playing," he explains. "Sabbath just scared me. I had never heard anything like that before. A friend of mine stole the Black Sabbath album from his big brother and played it for me and it just freaked me out – the aggression and the warmth in the low end. It was punchy and spooky and I thought, 'I wanna sound like that'."

Anyone who has ever mastered Sabbath understands that when you're channelling your inner Geezer Butler, mystique and attitude will only take you so far. Looking at some of the old videos from the early 70s, one notices a jazzy interplay between Geezer and drummer Bill Ward, as opposed to a straight blues attack. Fortunately for Scott, his music teacher at the time was not a rock and roll bassist but a jazz pianist. "He had me playing jazz standards and reading chord changes and studying the chord patterns – II-V-Is and different kind of groups – and that's how I learned to play, studying jazz standards."

The downside to learning bass from a pianist is that what one gains in theory, one sacrifices in

technique. Consequently, Scott developed a heavy-handed approach to playing that stifled the notes and prevented him from tapping into the nuances found in subtle changes of hand position and lighter treatment of the strings.

Realising that he needed to raise his game, Scott set his sights on Hollywood and the storied Musician's Institute. "I had a chance to go to music school, so I said I'm going to take a year and go to school. I'd heard about MI and I guess I thought it was going to be a really tough, accomplished school."

Soon after arriving at MI, however, he found that some of his classmates were brand new to playing an instrument. "There were dudes there that didn't know how to play. That freaked me out," he says. Fortunately, Scott tracked down staff like Paul Farnen and Alexis Sklarevski. "These guys were not there to make any friends or to make me feel good: they really busted my balls, so I kind of gravitated towards the tougher performances."

To this day, some are still surprised to learn that one of the most valuable educations he received during that era issued from a de facto instructor known as Vanilla Ice – yes, that Vanilla Ice – with Scott picking up a spot in the rapper's backing band. "We had a bus and I lived in that bus for a year. It was a good way to cut my teeth on living on the road. It was pretty horrible, and he's pretty horrible and the music was kind of horrible, but it was better than the work I'd been doing, and at least I was getting paid to play music and travel around the country."

Meanwhile, by 2001, alt-rock monsters Weezer crested a new wave of popularity stemming from their massively successful self-titled release that year, popularly known as the Green Album. Behind MTV-friendly hits 'Hash Pipe' and 'Island In The Sun', Weezer's fanbase multiplied with each spin on the radio. As is often the unfortunate case, the fame arrived with a hefty toll: bassist Mikey Welsh left the band to seek treatment for a cavalcade of personal problems (sadly, he passed away in October 2011), creating a vacancy at a critical time for Weezer. With touring obligations as well as a new album on the horizon, Weezer frontman Rivers Cuomo reached out to a mutual friend to see what ideas he had for filling the vacancy.

"I got the audition through this guy Barry Squire," Scott explains, "who introduces musicians to bands and vice versa. He was just a guy in LA at the time who, if a band were in trouble and needed somebody in a pinch, they'd call him up and he'd have a book full of musicians who could show up and do it. So Rivers had called him and said 'I need a bass player who can fill in for a while. Who have you got?' I think I was about the fifth person who he recommended. Because when you think of Weezer's bass player, you think: thin guy, nice button-up shirt, graduated college, kind of like an early-90s hipster, if there was such a thing at the time."

Scott was about as far from this image as one can get in Western culture. His gig in a biker rock band required very little in the way of image consciousness, and when Rivers asked Scott to come in, he wondered whether his no-frills rock and roll look would jive with such a stylish outfit. "When I got the call I thought, 'So what am I going to do? Not wear my rock clothes? Dress down for this?' But I said 'Fuck it, I'm going to go in there and be me. There's no way they're going to like me, but I'm just going to do what I do.' I went in there hauling my 70s SVT rig and my 60 P-bass and just went for it." To both his surprise and delight, they awarded him the gig, first on a temporary basis, then as a full-time member.

At the time, Weezer were preparing to record what would be *Maladroit*, and the songs were already done. Fortunately for Scott, *Maladroit* took the band in a heavier direction, more in line with his rock chops. "Rivers had written most of the songs for *Maladroit,* which was a little bit heavier, and it was right after the *Green Album*. He goes through different cycles and I think at that time he was looking for something a little bit heavier. The way I play is to play as low as possible in a natural tuning. I never wanted to play five-string, and somehow I managed to make a standard-tuned four string sound lower than a lot of other people could. I keep it in standard tuning, although Weezer tunes down to E flat."

"WHEN YOU THINK OF WEEZER'S BASS PLAYER, YOU THINK: THIN GUY, NICE BUTTON-UP SHIRT, GRADUATED COLLEGE, KIND OF LIKE AN EARLY-90S HIPSTER"

The synergy with the band is obvious to all. Scott is Weezer's third and longest-tenured bassist, appearing on the band's last six albums. Stylistically, he found himself moving away from complex runs with lots of notes towards a simpler, less-is-more style. Rivers writes the majority of the band's songs, leaving the bass parts out of the demos, giving Scott ample room to make his presence felt.

In the studio, Scott primarily plays his 60 Precision with an old Ampeg SVT and a Sansamp Bass Driver to add teeth to the direct signal. He has used a number of pedals for recording, including an old Sovtek Big Muff, Lovetone Meatball, Fox Fuzz Wah, Zvex Super Hard On and a Colorsound Fuzz, Electro Harmonix POG, and MXR Phase 100. Ever the gearhead, on Weezer's *Red Album*, he ran the Moog Voyager through a Moogerfooger Ring Modulator, Delay and Phaser.

Scott discusses bass cabinets with the same fervour that some people use when discussing politics or sex, opting for 4x12 and 2x15 cabs from Chicago's Emperor Amps. Barely five years old, Emperor is a custom shop with a long waiting list for their cabinets, and according to Scott, the craftsmanship is well worth the wait. Where some people post pictures of their cats or their children on Instagram, on any given day, Scott is good for two or three pictures of his rig, and happily banters with fellow bass enthusiasts about pedals, cabinets and all things bass.

While the Weezer camp enjoy a break between albums, Scott has begun what some feel is a long-overdue solo project, 10 years in the making and inspired by his wife, the author Jillian Lauren. "I had this piece of music that I thought was really cool, and it was around the same time that I read my wife's book, *Pretty*. She asked if I could come up with some music for the book trailer and I was like, 'Yeah, I've actually got a piece that I think will be pretty cool, and I'd like to write a whole song based on the character in your book'. That's what spawned the lyrical content – that and some cool riffs that I had come up with."

Upon completion of this song, 'Pretty', the creative floodgates opened, and he will release an EP of the new material this summer. Sounding nothing like his day job, his solo project, aptly called Shriners, showcases his mastery of groove, with a smokey, low end that is offset by sparkly accents and bright melody, infusing the songs with texture and depth.

When the EP is released, Scott plans on continuing on with a full-length debut. There is also his day job with Weezer, which he expects to restart at some point soon, and in the meantime, he enjoys life in Los Angeles with Jillian and their son whom, Scott advises, has already nailed his rock star poses down cold. No surprises – he's got a great teacher.

Info: www.weezer.com, www.scottshriner.com

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It used to be the case that if you wanted a US-built Spector bass, there was no choice: you had to have a thru-neck design. This method of construction was long considered the optimum way of building an instrument, and a thru-neck is still considered the benchmark by many. But bolt-on neck basses are no longer seen as second best, and some of the finest instruments available are now made this way. Which brings us neatly to this beauty: the Spector NS4 USA.

BUILD QUALITY

There's no denying the wow factor here. This is serious bass eye-candy, not least for the gorgeous tone-woods used. Here's a rundown: the body is made from two pieces of lightweight, book-matched pale mahogany. The neck is three-piece rock maple and the fretboard a piece of pale, straight-grained pau ferro. The headstock is faced with what looks like an ebony veneer and the top is spalted buckeye burl. This is the wood taken from the upper root area of a buckeye tree after it's died and various bacteria and fungi have started to attack and break down the timber, creating those amazing blue and gray-green hues. Straight from the tree it's too soft and unstable to use, so it's injected with a plastic resin at high pressure to stabilise it, then hardened in a kiln and cut into usable pieces. It's an expensive and wasteful process and only a small percentage of the wood can be used, but as you can see, the end result is stunning. Okay, that's the dendrology lesson over.

"THE SOUND ITSELF IS AS GOOD AS WE'VE COME TO EXPECT FROM STUART SPECTOR'S US BASSES. IT'S INCREDIBLY RICH AND DETAILED, AND NO MATTER HOW SEVERE THE SETTINGS, THERE'S ALWAYS A CLASSY, DETAILED TONE"

Of course, having all these amazing woods doesn't necessarily guarantee a great bass, but in the hands of Stuart Spector and his elite team, the results were always going to be pretty special – and it's obvious even from the quality of the finish (which has been beautifully applied and rubbed back to a perfectly even matt lustre) that skilled hands have been at work here.

This new bolt-on NS4 has several innovations. Although the body shares the original NS body silhouette, there's a little less contouring and rounding to this bass. Also new is the 'deep-socket neck insert'. This looks like a good compromise between a bolt-on and thru-neck design and as we shall see, the results quite literally speak for themselves. Aside from the tonal benefits, this feature also creates a solid and stable neck join.

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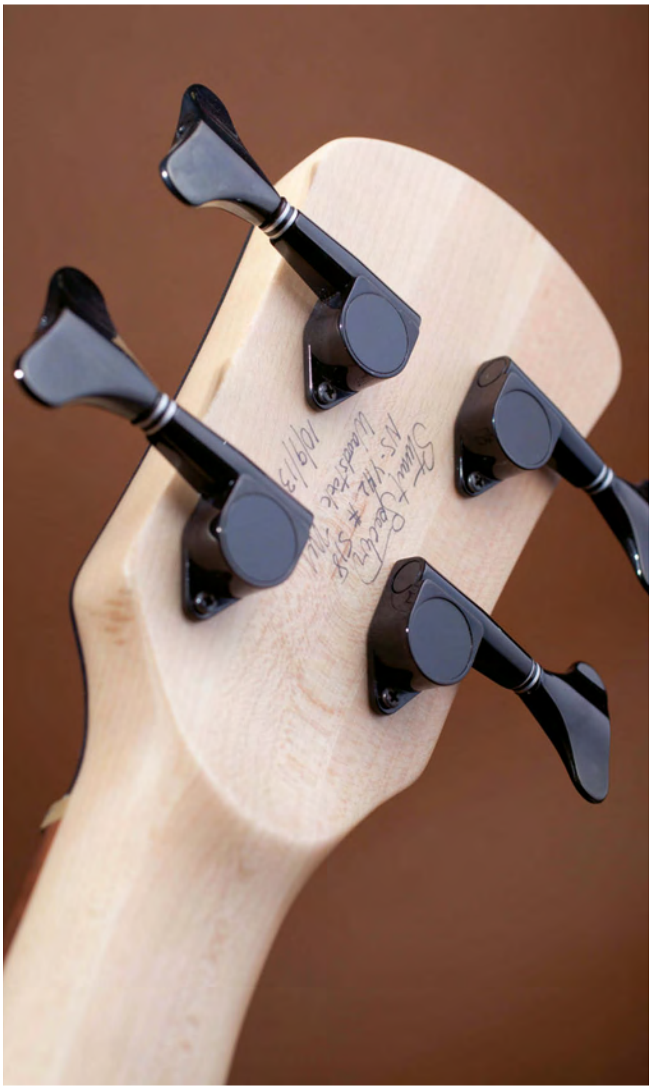

But it's not all change: fans of the original NS4 bass will be pleased to see that there's still plenty of the old thoroughbred's DNA to be found. The brass nut is still there, as are the active EMG pickups and Aguilar OBP-3 preamp that have been a feature on these basses for some time now. The hardware was always of the best quality on Spector basses, and here they've gone for a black chrome bridge with matching control knobs and Gotoh GB7 tuners. Flip the bass over and on the back of the body you have a Gotoh quick-change battery holder, a black plastic cover panel and five black chrome bolts and ferrules holding the graphite-reinforced neck firmly in place.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

Strap this bass on and it feels comfortable, balanced and familiar. It's substantially lighter than the thru-neck version and this, along with the slimmer neck profile, means it feels much more contemporary. In fact the neck is a revelation, the slim, fast dimensions are perfect and the smooth edges uninterrupted by any harsh fret ends or roughly finished edge dot markers.

The active EMG pickups and Aguilar preamp on the NS4 USA mean there's tons of tonal scope. I particularly like the pull pot for the mid, which allows you to choose between a hi or lo middle range – this is where all the important frequencies are. Having this kind of control is a real asset and perfectly complements the P/J configuration of the EMGs.

The sound itself is as good as we've come to expect from Stuart Spector's US basses. It's incredibly rich and detailed, and no matter how severe the settings, there's always a classy, detailed tone, rich in harmonics and with an underlying kickdrum thump that will always make its presence felt in the mix. You definitely still get that classic 'Spector sound', which always works brilliantly for rock and metal, but this new design is much more versatile. As well as that tight, thundering low end, you can just as easily choose a more subtle tone for say, jazz or funk – clean, bright and punchy.

CONCLUSION

I always felt that those early Spector basses sounded great back in the 80s, but were heavy with big chunky necks. No doubt this was partly a result of the thru-neck construction and dense tonewoods. These days, many people prefer the bright sound and lighter weight of a two-piece bass, and the NS4 is a good example of how you can take a great bass and fundamentally change the way it's made without losing any of the character of the original. For me, the new bolt-on NS4 USA is a natural evolution and a welcome addition to the Spector range, keeping the NS4 right up there among the most desirable basses available today.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £2999
BODY | Lightweight mahogany
FINISH | Satin
NECK | Graphite reinforced three-piece maple
NECK INLAYS | Mother of pearl
FINGERBOARD | Pau ferro rosewood
FRETS | 24
CONTROLS | Bass, treble, pull hi/lo mid, pickup pan, volume
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
TUNERS | Gotoh GB7 black chrome
PICKUP | 2x EMG active

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Gorgeous looks and versatile too. Lightweight, fast and comfortable with one of the best necks out there. Great price for a bass of this quality
MINUS | Hardly anything. The back panel would have been nice in mahogany to match the back rather than black plastic, but that's about it
OVERALL | You still get that classic ergonomic shape, but it's leaner, meaner and sounds better than ever

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

3LEAF AUDIO and DARKGLASS FX

MIKE BROOKS STOMPS ON FUZZ PEDALS FROM EXCITING CHALLENGERS TO THE EFFECTS MARKET

Bass Direct
www.bassdirect.co.uk

3Leaf Audio is a tiny US company started by bassist and engineer Spencer Doren. His 3Leaf Audio Wonderlove envelope filter is one of our favourite bass effects ever: bombproof and simple to use. Most important of all, it sounds great with no unwanted hums or crackles, either from the circuitry or the footswitch. So, has Doren maintained these high standards with his new effect? Oh yes.

Although that curiously punctuated name is definitely odd, the You're Doom has the same nuclear-shelter construction and near-noiseless circuitry as the rest of the 3Leaf range. The simple control layout allows you to balance the sound to the bypass level and adjust the amount of effect you want with the 'mix' control. The gain works as you'd expect, while the tone control alters the high frequency of the sound, much like the 'cutoff' control on an old analogue synth. The 'shape' mini toggle switch changes the mid EQ to give you a brighter or darker sound by scooping or boosting the mids, the latter giving you a powerful and dirty lead tone. It produces the same kind of sawtooth wave distortion that was a part of the sound of those early analogue synths, and works by adding a nasty but smooth distortion to the upper octave harmonics of the note, while still keeping the integrity of your original tone.

This is a really usable and versatile pedal, responding to playing dynamics and gain, so it works best with active basses, although even the weediest pickups will solicit some serious distortion when played hard. And that's the point. Select the mid-scoop with the switch, and by altering your playing dynamics you can change the sound as you play, enabling you to make a repeating bass riff sound like one of those cool Oberheim or Prophet 5 analogue bass synth parts with a slow filter sweep. Flick the switch to mid boost, crank up the tone and you have a brilliant Mini-Moog style lead tone, the sort that Herbie Hancock or Chick Corea used to such good effect back in the day.

On to Finnish company Darkglass, who are obviously as impressed with the quality of 3Leaf Audio's products as we are, as they've teamed up with Spencer and his team to produce the Duality Fuzz. This features the same solid construction and noiseless circuitry as all 3Leaf effects and offers some truly epic distortion and fuzz effects.

"THIS IS A REALLY USABLE AND VERSATILE PEDAL, RESPONDING TO PLAYING DYNAMICS AND GAIN, SO IT WORKS BEST WITH ACTIVE BASSES, ALTHOUGH EVEN THE WEEDIEST PICKUPS WILL SOLICIT SOME SERIOUS DISTORTION WHEN PLAYED HARD"

The controls are laid out in a logical sequence, with the 'blend' control allowing you to mix the fuzz effect with your clean bass sound. The 'level' adjusts the level of the effect (well, duh) and the 'filter' control acts as a tone control for the fuzz. The important control here (and the most fun) is the 'duality' knob. Turned fully anticlockwise the distortion is a synthy old-school fuzz – just like Jimi Hendrix might have used with one of his old Electro-Harmonix pedals. Turn it fully clockwise and you have a more contemporary, hi-gain effect – and of course you can blend between the two to find the effect you like.

This pedal is great fun to use. Using the duality control you can dial up just about any fuzz and distortion effect you can imagine, from the subtle to the completely bonkers. Some of the most usable stuff is to be found by blending both kinds of distortion with some clean signal, in effect layering three different bass sounds. There are some brilliant, vintage-sounding effects to be found here.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

3LEAF AUDIO YOU'RE DOOM
PRICE | £180
MADE IN | USA
CONTROLS | Volume, Mix, Gain, Tone, Shape

DARKGLASS ELECTRONICS DUALITY DUAL FUZZ ENGINE
PRICE | £175
MADE | In Finland
CONTROLS | Level, Blend, Filter, Duality

BGM RATING

3LEAF AUDIO YOU'RE DOOM

BUILD QUALITY	10/10
SOUND QUALITY	10/10
VALUE	8/10

DARKGLASS

BUILD QUALITY	10/10
SOUND QUALITY	10/10
VALUE	8/10

LITTLE GUITAR WORKS
Torzal

DO NOT ADJUST YOUR SET. THAT NECK IS MEANT TO BE THAT WAY. KEV SANDERS GETS TO GRIPS WITH THIS FUTURISTIC FIVE

Bass Direct
www.bassdirect.co.uk

Would it help if I told you that this bass probably doesn't look as weird from the audience's point of view as it does on this page? There's no point in dodging the fact that the Torzal is well, a bit different. I once owned an old Gibson EB3 with a bit of a twist in the neck, but that didn't come close to this...

BUILD QUALITY

But be in no doubt: this is a bass of seriously good quality. The materials and workmanship on the Torzal are top rate. It's a looker, too: that body shape strikes a nice balance between classic and contemporary, with a large top horn, stubby lower horn and a pronounced concave curve to the back – a perfect fit against my sculpted one-pack!

The top is a gorgeous piece of quilted maple but it looks almost plain-Jane compared to the stunning tiger stripe maple used for the one-piece neck. It's rare to find timber of this quality used without having to pay a big premium for it.

> "APPARENTLY, A FANNED FRETS VERSION IS ON ITS WAY: THAT'S GOT TO BE THE MOST PHYSIOTHERAPIST-FRIENDLY BASS EVER"

There's a near-perfect heel join, with seven ferruled screws clamping the neck to the lightweight swamp ash body, itself stained to a reddish brown, mahogany hue. At the other end of the neck, a gentle volute supports a neat headstock, the front of which is veneered with the same quilted maple as the body. The fingerboard is made from pau ferro, a tonewood with many of the properties of rosewood, not least colour, but it's a more environmentally-friendly choice than rosewood, which has been massively over-exploited in the past.

It's hard to believe that this bass has a truss rod, but it does, although I'm not too sure what you'd be adjusting. In fact the bass I played had very little neck relief, but due to the long 35" scale length (meaning a nice, taut low B string) it was completely free of any buzzes or rattles.

In keeping with the high standards of timber and workmanship, the electronics used in this bass are top end: Nordstrand Flat Stacks in bridge and neck positions, with a Nordstrand two-band EQ with passive tone, active/passive switch and coil tap. There's no skimping on the hardware either, with lightweight Hipshot tuners and a Hipshot bridge, seated on a wedge-shaped fillet of pau ferro.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

The idea of this bizarre neck design is that it relieves stress to the player's left-hand wrist and arm. I'm usually a bit cynical when it comes to this sort of thing, but I have to say it really does seem to work. The twist of the neck certainly decreases the bend in your wrist at the low end, and that great-sounding low B string also means that, if you wish, you can spend most of your time around the fifth fret, keeping your left arm at a more natural angle. This makes the Torzal very comfortable to play over long periods, even if you're prone to strains or injuries, which plenty of bass players are.

One thing I did find slightly unnerving to start with at least was that when playing around the first three frets the twist of the neck means that you can't actually see your left-hand fingers. However, the neck has a lovely shallow C profile and string spacing is bang on – I'd say about the same as a five-string Jazz – so you very quickly forget the rather alarming fretboard angle. Within a very short time, you realise just how easy and comfortable the Torzal is to play.

It may look a bit odd, but there's nothing odd about the tone; it sounds great. The 35" scale means that you can play the B string as hard as the E without it ever rattling or sounding flabby.

As you'd expect given the timbers used, the fundamental sound of the Torzal is bright and clear, rich in harmonics and with a weight

to the tone that you only get with top-quality tonewoods. With careful use of the powerful EQ, you can summon up pretty much anything you need. The low end is colossal, a good indicator of the wide frequency response of the pickups. Panning toward to the bridge pickup gives an awesome tone, rich in mids and harmonics and oozing class. Turning to the front pickup, the sound is like a glorious marriage of Precision and Jazz, perfect for sliding a soul groove under your fingers or just rocking out. The bottom line is that even if you ignore the twisty neck idea for a moment, you still have a bass with a quality of sound and finish that compares well with any handmade bass at this price, or even higher.

CONCLUSION

Most bass players who play and practise regularly will have suffered from some minor physical problems at some point. For most, it will be no worse than sore fingers. But some will have problems with repetitive strain injury, carpal tunnel syndrome or tennis elbow (my own bugbear). For these bassists, the Torzal could be of real benefit. Far from being a gimmick, it might be the difference between being able and unable to play bass. Apparently, a fanned frets version is on its way: that's got to be the most physiotherapist-friendly bass ever.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £2749
BODY | Swamp Ash
TOP | Quilted maple
NECK | Tiger stripe maple
FINGERBOARD | Pau ferro
CONTROLS | Nordstrand two-band EQ with passive tone active/passive switch and coil tap.
TUNERS | Hipshot lightweight
PICKUPS | Nordstrand Flat Stacks in bridge and neck positions
CASE INCLUDED? | Yes, Protec

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Beautiful timbers, top spec electronics and hardware combine to make this a seriously good bass with a sound that any bass player would be proud of
MINUS | It's hard to get past those looks. Your bandmates (if they're anything like mine) will almost certainly take the mickey
OVERALL | One of the few basses that address the musculoskeletal problems that bass players can suffer from. As a bonus, it also happens to be a good looking, great-sounding instrument

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

TRBX
ELECTRIC BASSES
300 SERIES
VOL
PIC
BAL
LO
HI
2-band performance EQ
SLAP
PICK
FLAT
FINGER
SOLO
Style switch
500 SERIES
VOL
PIC
BAL
LO
MID
HI
3-band active EQ
Battery alert LED
ACTIVE
PASSIVE
CONSTANT GAIN
A/P switch
TRBX 304
IN PEWTER
TRBX 505 IN
TRANSLUCENT
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YAMAHA
TRBX 505

RELAUNCHING THEIR BASSES WITH A NEW EQ APPROACH, YAMAHA ARE AIMING AT THE LOW TO MIDDLE MARKET WITH THE TRBX RANGE. JOEL MCIVER ROAD-TESTS THE TOP-OF-THE-RANGE 505

Yamaha
www.uk.yamaha.com

The only megacorporation on planet Earth that we can think of that makes motorbikes, pianos and sports gear as well as bass guitars, Yamaha has made much of their recent re-entry into the affordable bass market with their new TRBX series. The lower-spec 300 series comes in at a bit more than half the RRP of the 500-branded basses that we're testing today, and specifically the TRBX 505, the five-string version. Last time we looked there were approximately 85 gazillion other basses available around the £500 price point: does this instrument have what it takes to stand out?

BUILD QUALITY

The designers at Yamaha have wasted no time in making the TRBX body shape as ergonomically slinky as possible, chamfering it in just about every place possible. If their goal has been to create a supremely comfy bass, they've pulled it off admirably: it's an absolute pleasure to pick up and play, whether seated or on a strap. The bass is light and balances well, with no sign of headstock dive, and there are no signs of any corners being cut when it comes to the finish or hardware. Mind you, we'd be surprised if there were: a company as immense as Yamaha should have its quality control perfectly evolved, and so it appears to be in this case.

The controls move smoothly without being too lightweight, an important consideration given the relatively advanced tone-shaping options available. Tuners, bridge, rear panels and frets are all finished to our satisfaction – and what's this on the back? A battery warning LED, you say? Praise be to the gods of bass, we've been praying for such a thing for years. No more pre-gig nerves about the imminent death of your preamp... then again, what happens when the battery powering the battery power LED runs out? No, we mustn't think like that. That way madness lies.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

Let's be serious now, because serious is what this bass is. Pick up, plug in and give thanks to the cunning scientists in their white coats at Yamaha, whose work on the clever active EQ has paid off in fine style. For starters, you can flip between active and passive modes with no change in gain level, the stated aim of the switch provided and one that is achieved smoothly. Tweak the three-band EQ and the fun starts: a nippy, glassy slap

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

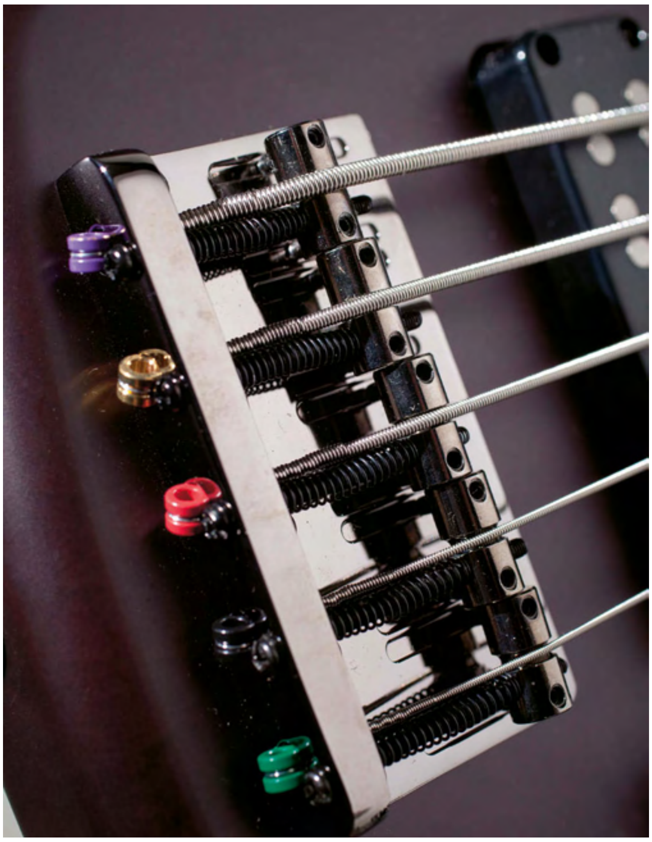
PRICE | £480
MADE IN | Japan
BODY | Mahogany
FINISH | Black, white, brown
NECK | Maple/mahogany, five-piece
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
NUT WIDTH | 43mm
NECK JOIN | Bolt-on
FRETS | 24
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
CONTROLS | Volume, pickup balance, 3-band EQ, active/passive switch, battery alert LED
PICKUPS | H5 dual-coil pickups
TUNERS | Yamaha
BRIDGE | Yamaha

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A keen spec for under £500: tone range and playability excellent
MINUS | Feels a touch insubstantial thanks to body chamfering
OVERALL | The TRBX 505 is worth your attention. Sure, there are several worthy competitors at this point in the market, but this holds its own nevertheless

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★★☆



"WE HAVE NO HESITATION IN GIVING THE TRBX 505 A WHOLEHEARTED THUMBS-UP"

tone is easy to dial in, while pick-friendly mid-tones are there aplenty, and soulful Motown-style stuff is available if you roll your top and mids off a tad.

It was perhaps inevitable that carving off bits of the body in order to make it comfortable would have an effect on the TRBX's sustain and overall feeling of solidity, and indeed this is the case: this isn't exactly a lightweight instrument, because that word implies cheapness and that is absolutely not how the bass feels. However, in creating a body as slick as this, Yamaha have chosen not to retain the chunky, heavy, gravitas-laden feel that many bassists enjoy. Still, the low frequencies don't suffer: there's plenty of bottom end if you need it, especially when the active EQ comes into play.

You'll have fun with the neck, one of the slimmest and fastest we've encountered in a little while: Yamaha know who their audience is, it seems, with punks, rockers and metal players alike the probable demographic in line for the TRBX series. Again, don't expect elephantine solidity: this neck is, like the body, perfect for precise, speedy fills and mid tones rather than earth-shaking presence.

One whinge. The TRBX 300 series actually outdoes its more expensive siblings in one unexpected area. Playing through the models at this year's Winter NAMM, we really enjoyed the 300 range's five-position tone presets switch, which allowed the player to get an instant EQ designed for pick, slap, soloing and other uses. Sure, the 300 basses' EQ is cheaper and less versatile than that of the 500s, but that option would have been very welcome indeed. Still, you can't have everything. As Ronnie Scott used to say, where would you put it?

CONCLUSION

There's no escaping the fact that there are many, many other basses with this pricetag. Try before you buy, as widely as possible – but we have no hesitation in giving the TRBX 505 a wholehearted thumbs-up. Whether Yamaha can carve themselves a piece of the horrendously oversaturated low/mid-budget market we have no idea, but with this bass, they're definitely giving it a well-thought-out, well-designed shot.

ATS

LBA-5 head, C312X1 and C310X1-T2 cabs

FROM THE LAND OF HIGH FASHION COMES A SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED CONTENDER IN THE LIGHTWEIGHT RIG STAKES. WHAT GIVES, SAYS MIKE BROOKS?

Bass Direct
www.bassdirect.co.uk

Originating from Italy, the name ATS may be new to these shores, but that may change shortly as their wares appear over here courtesy of distributor Bass Gear in Twyford. Having developed boutique amplification for some time, the current range is now ready to make a dent in some established markets and looking at the products on offer, they've definitely taken onboard the current buzzwords in bass amplification, 'small', 'powerful' and 'lightweight'. So what have they got to shout about? Let's take a look and have a listen.

BUILD QUALITY & FEATURES

The LBA-5 amp has been tailored to appeal to a lot of bass players and truly fits in with the current requirements of bassists, judging by the sales of small Class D amps in recent years. Weighing in at a measly 1.9 kilograms, it looks and feels like a quality piece of kit, and in terms of front panel layout, the eight controls give the player a comprehensive level of control over their tone and overall sound. Offering two jack inputs (one for your bass, the other as an auxiliary input for external devices), the three-band EQ offers a cut and boost level of 15dB, while the mid-frequency sweep is active from 200Hz right upto 2kHz.

The ever-useful headphone socket can also be found on the front panel, while the rear panel is as efficiently understated as the front with a single Speakon connection (for both 8 and 4 ohm loads), a tuner output, FX loop and a balanced XLR DI output with a level control. Rated at 500 watts or 250 watts (dependent on a 4 or 8 ohm load), this amp is definitely looking to pack a punch, especially when two cabinets are connected. One point worth noting is that the amplifier doesn't come with a cover or bag: this is an optional extra for £60, however the RRP quoted here does include the bag in the price.

The cabs are made from okume timber and are neodymium equipped, so transporting them is no big deal and their dimensions make them easily stackable: either cab can be carried in one hand without much grief. The cabs are covered in a tough felt material and fitted with moulded plastic corners and a black speaker grille, but the real benefit is the small amount of floor space they take up. Both cabs can be stacked vertically or on their side on feet for a different sound dispersal, although when placed vertically, the vented sides permit better bass frequency dispersal. The carry handle sits on the top side, with plenty of space under it for your hands when you need to pick it up.

"PLAYERS OF A ROCK PERSUASION MAY CONSIDER IT A LITTLE TOO 'CLEAN' AND PRECISE FOR THEIR LIKING, BUT THEY MAY BE SURPRISED BY THE PERFORMANCE THAT THIS SETUP CAN DELIVER."

Both cabinets are capable of handling a 300 watt load, while the 12-inch cab can go up to 400 watts at a push. Both come with adjustable tweeters and a passive two speaker system in conjunction with the active speaker to create a compression pipe cross. The passive speakers push each other in phase, primarily to give improved low frequency reproduction, not identical to an isobaric setup but similar in terms of what it needs to achieve.

SOUND QUALITY

For this review, I used a passive Fender Precision and an active Status Empathy to assess how the amp and cabs responded to those basses' different sounds. It comes as no surprise that all three components contributed to a precise and articulate delivery, the amp's controls offering an extensive degree of control, with small adjustments having a noticeable impact on the overall sound. The vented cab design and passive drivers work well: cabinets of these dimensions need all the help they can get in order to work effectively on a stage and competing with a band.

I wasn't entirely sure that this set-up would be loud enough, but it has a significant amount of power on tap and putting the cabs on their side to give the passive drivers some help via the venting made a marked difference. This provided a rounder overall delivery with more air being shifted to make the bottom end more solid, a definite plus when using the Precision. By their nature and the size of the drivers, the cabinets have distinctive tones with the 12-inch equipped cabinet having a fuller tone and more bottom end than the 10-inch cab, not that the 10-inch cab is any slouch in terms of delivery. Both cabs produced a good tight response before calling the tweeters into play, with hardly any discernible bottom end flap. Obviously neither cab can compare with a fully equipped bigger cabinet, but what you lose in brute force and sheer tonal aggression, you gain with portability, lightweight construction and articulate tonal delivery.

Calling the tweeters into play gave the sound more focus but they also give the impression of increasing the volume, as there is a tangible improvement in the delivery of the bass signal. The tweeters brighten both cabinets up, providing the top end sparkle that active instruments benefit from with their onboard preamps, although the 12-inch cab benefited more as the tweeter supplied the top end delivery that complements the more rounded delivery of the 12-inch drivers.

The Contour control on the amp has a serious impact and gives the player another option when sculpting their desired tone. It takes some of the mid bark away and gives the overall tone a less raucous bite, but it is also possible to set up a pretty good basic tone by leaving the EQ flat and using the contour control to give the bass character plus a stronger fundamental tone. Adjusting the EQ is simple enough, but use discretion before cranking the bass and treble controls flat out. This is finely tuned equipment, so use it sensibly!

CONCLUSION

This set-up offers everything you could want in a modern, portable bass rig. I can't see anyone investing in this gear and being disappointed. It addresses the needs of the working bassist and the semi-pro player alike, but quality costs, and that is what you are paying for here – quality. Players of a rock persuasion may consider it a little too 'clean' and precise for their liking, but they may be surprised by the performance that this setup can deliver. The guys at ATS certainly know their stuff, and after using the gear for a few hours, it is apparent that this has all been designed and assembled in anintelligent manner. Check it out.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ATS LBA-5 HEAD
PRICE | £849 including amp case/bag
MADE IN | Italy
CONTROLS | Gain, gain 2 , contour, mid-level (+/- 15 dB), frequency (200Hz – 2kHz), bass (+/- 15 dB), treble (+/- 15 dB), master level, limiter LED, power on and LED, ground lift switch, DI output level control
INPUTS | 2 x ¼-inch jack inputs
OUTPUTS | 1 x Speakon 4-8 ohm load output, ¼-inch jack tuner output, ¼-inch jack headphone output, FX loop send/return, balanced DI XLR output
POWER OUTPUT | 250 watts @ 8 ohms, 500 watts @ 4 ohms
DIMENSIONS | 100mm (H) x 220mm (W) x 300mm (D)
WEIGHT | 1.9kg (4.18 lb)

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ATS C312X1 / C310X1-T2 CABINETS
PRICE | £599 / £550
MADE IN | Italy
IMPEDANCE | 8 ohm / 4 or 8 ohm
POWER HANDLING | 300 watts @ 8 ohms / 300 watts @ 4 or 8 ohms (nominal power RMS 250 watts)
DIMENSIONS | 455mm (H) x 360mm (W) x 460mm (D) (both cabs)
WEIGHT | 15Kgs (22 lbs) / 16Kgs (35.3 lbs)
SPEAKERS | 12-inch ATS active woofer + 2 x 10-inch passive cones + adjustable tweeter (-9 dB - +12 dB) / 10-inch ATS active speaker + 2 x 10-inch passive cones + adjustable tweeter (-9 dB - +12 dB)
CONNECTIONS | 2 x Speakon (both cabs)

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★★★★☆☆

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | A compact, well thought out set-up that works really well and sounds great. Highly portable and easy to transport with plenty of power to boot
MINUS | May struggle to gain attention over bigger names already hogging the 'small amp, light cabs' market
OVERALL | A great package that should appeal to a broad range of players. Well worth considering

Bass
Guitar Magazine

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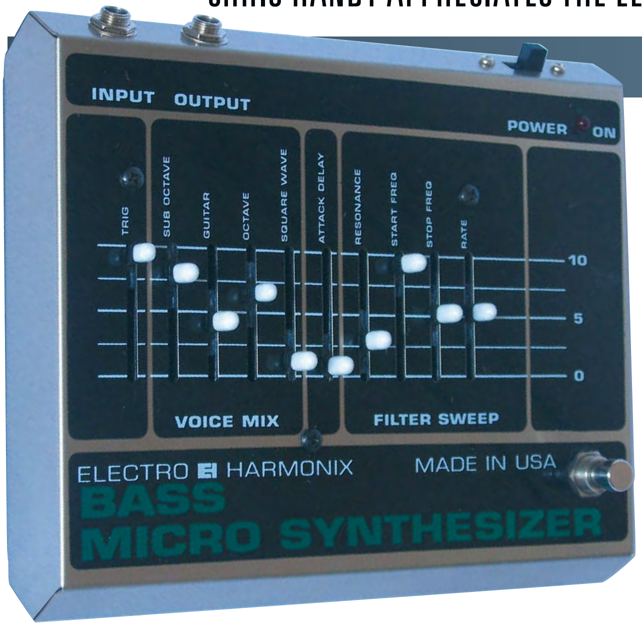
ISO 50001

ELECTRO-HARMONIX
Bass Micro Synth

CHRIS HANBY APPRECIATES THE ELECTRO-HARMONIX BASS MICRO SYNTH



The ability to cop 80s synth lines and Moog tones is almost a necessity for bass players today. With recent improvements in digital modelling technology, synth bass pedals have become more easily available and affordable. While digital emulations have brought bass synth to the masses, the original and still one of my favourites was the all-analogue Electro-Harmonix Bass Micro Synth. So, let's step into the realm of the ivory-tinklers for a while and see what the fuss is about.

IN USE

The simple folded sheet metal case typical of EHX feels sturdy enough: indeed, given the size of the Micro Synth, a cast enclosure would have made it very heavy. It houses two densely populated circuit boards which essentially comprise a filter section, an octave section and a fuzz/distortion section. The BMS uses white-capped sliders instead of conventional pots to adjust the 10 functions. 'Trigger', a sensitivity control, sets the volume at which the filter activates. Four 'Voice' functions adjust the amount of 'Guitar' (dry signal), 'Sub Octave' (-1 octave), 'Octave' (+1 octave), and 'Square Wave' (a synthy distortion). The -1 and +1 octave settings are analogue and so some inherent distortion is present at extreme settings. The 'Attack Delay' slider reduces the attack of the note as you increase its intensity, creating a bowed effect. The last four sliders adjust the 'Filter' section; 'Resonance' adjusts the shape of the Q filter. The 'Start Frequency' and 'Stop Frequency' sliders select the point at which the filter sweep begins and ends. Finally the 'Rate' alters the speed of the filter sweep.

Having such broad control over the voice and filter sections can be somewhat overwhelming, so it's a good idea to start with the suggested settings in the manual. They offer a range of Lead, Percussive Synth and Bowed sounds, and with some fine-tuning can produce fantastic results. Small tweaks to individual controls can change the sound radically, so it's worth spending some time on this as you'll soon produce a myriad of rich and organic synth tones from a bygone era. I think the BMS still gives synth legends like the Deep Impact and Korg G5 a good run for their money.

The BMS has a few flaws that are worth pointing out. One is the bypass: of the three BMS units I've owned, only one has had a decent bypass. Secondly, as there is no LED to indicate that the unit is on, many players mod their units to include a status LED and 3PDT true bypass (instructions are easily available on the internet). Lastly, and perhaps the most annoying, is that you cannot save presets. This is particularly frustrating if your sliders get a knock mid-gig and you are left with a dramatically different sound than the one you were expecting.

AVAILABILITY

The original 24v Bass Micro Synth was discontinued in the mid 2000s, but it crops up on eBay quite frequently. In 2008 EHX re-released the Bass Micro Synth as part of the XO series. It featured a new smaller enclosure, compact PCB layout and boasts True Bypass. The XO Bass Micro Synth is widely available for around £199. As ever, the older version is now becoming the most sought after despite its bulky size, 24v PSU and lack of True Bypass.

ALTERNATIVES

The BMS offers a unique take on synth simulation and its all-analogue circuit gives it a particular sound. However, there are some other great synths available; check out TWA's Great Divide 2.0 for $399. It is a great update and improvement on the BMS and sounds killer. The Chunk Systems Octavius Squeezer (£419) also has its fans, using analogue circuitry with a digital interface. The Markbass Super Synth (£235) is very usable and has a computer application to edit and save settings.

CONCLUSION

Don't expect to plug into the BMS and begin playing convincing panpipes, grand piano or DX7 brass sounds. That would be to miss the point totally. However, with good technique and some tweaking it will produce very plausible Moog, ARP and Oberheim tones similar to those used by the likes of Stevie Wonder, Weather Report, Herbie Hancock and Pink Floyd. It's not perfect and it does glitch out from time to time, but that is part of its beauty and analogue nature.

Chris has amassed a staggering amount of insightful, interesting and sometimes irrelevant information on bass guitar equipment during his career as a professional bassist. So we continue to push electronics and bass amps under his nose and make him report to us on his favourites.

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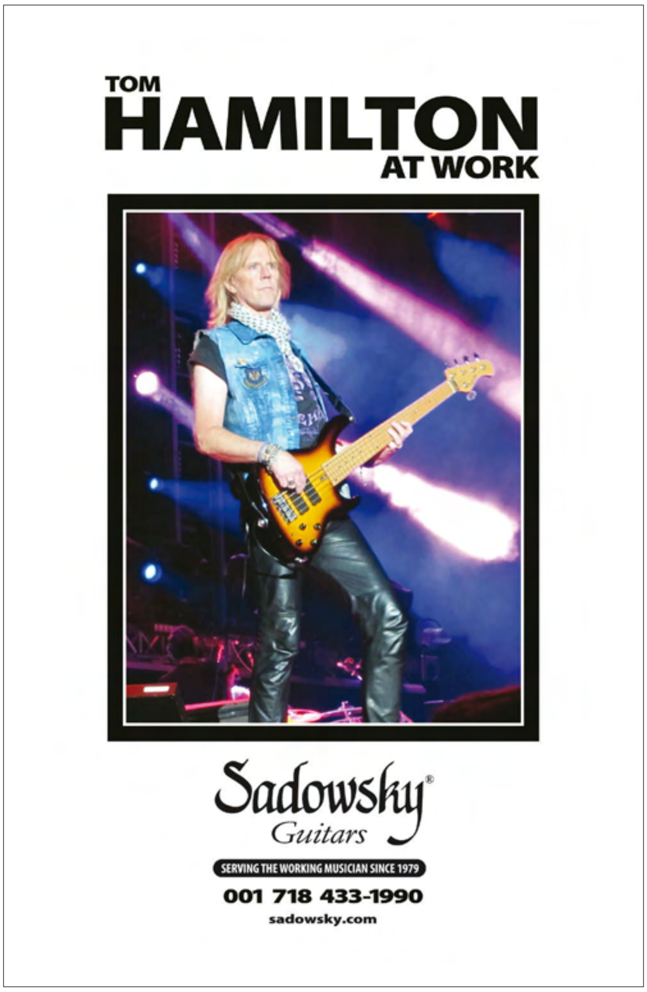
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THE JAZZ BASSIST

RUTH GOLLER

Jazz guru Ruth considers the issue of stability for pro musos

Being a musician can be exciting, but you must be prepared for a lack of regularity: your life can be completely different from one month to the next, with the only static element being music. For example, I was touring a lot last year, which meant lots of travelling and playing the same kind of music every day, whereas this year I returned to the reality of the London jazz musician's lifestyle, which means practising, rehearsing and gigging while learning lots of different sets of music all the time. In this way your musical mind is challenged, because there's a certain freshness about playing different music all the time. Currently I'm depping for various bands, which sometimes means I have to learn very complex music for a single gig. It can feel a bit disheartening to put so much work into one event, but on the other hand I am aware that I am improving as a musician from doing it. Essentially, I'm practising lots of important things at speed. It's a different kind of practice, but it helps in many ways. My reading tends to improve, for example. Another plus is that when you play with a band who have been together for a long time, it's good to experience their shared dynamic. When I have to learn very hard music it helps me to take it step by step: I take an initial look at the music, highlight the difficult parts and then take a break from it for a few days. In that time my brain seems to internalise the bits that I find difficult and when I come back to them, they are usually a lot easier.

soundcloud.com/ruth-goller

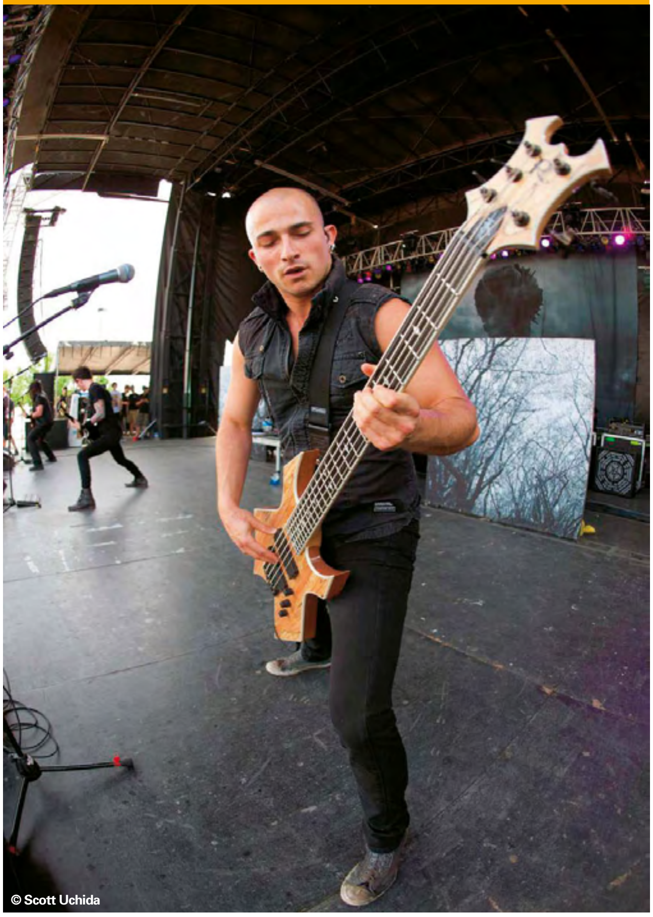
THE METALHEAD

PAOLO GREGOLETTO

Trivium's bassist ponders the pitfalls of life on the road

To say that the last two months on tour have been eventful would be a severe understatement. We had to make a drummer change mid-tour, with our drum tech Mat Madiro getting behind the kit within 24 hours of being asked to do so. I would say it all ended happily ever after he got on board, but that wasn't the case, because our singer Matt lost his voice. We cancelled the remaining four shows to make sure his voice was not damaged and that our massive UK and European festival tour wouldn't be put in jeopardy. To add insult to injury, I'm as sick as a dog. Poor rock star! Anyway, my intention was not to depress you with the woes of a being a touring musician. If my time on the road has taught me anything, it's that this lifestyle can be both glamorous and unglamorous, full of peaks and valleys. Our show at Rock On The Range (think Download, but in an American soccer stadium) was a perfect example of those ups and downs combining to form that realistic, everyday middle ground in life. Here I was, the little bass player that could, sick with a sinus infection and about to take the stage to over 15,000 people who were ready to have the time of their life. Hey, I wanted to have fun too! I just had to do it with phlegm in the back of my throat and a headache. Our tech and now drummer, Mr Madiro, had the weight of the world on his shoulders, playing for this many people for the first time in his life with all the industry ogling him, and us for that matter. Fortunately, the general consensus from the Twitterverse was that we killed it! Now I'm home again and it feels great. Or maybe it's just the Prednisone and antibiotics kicking in...

www.trivium.org



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THE ALTERNATIVE ROCKER

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN

Therapy? bassist Mike talks on-the-road practising

© www.ashleybird.com

I'm assuming that everyone reading this has a little bit of a practice routine and a space or area where they get time to do it. With modern technology it's now pretty easy to fire up an app or a small combo with headphones. Obviously nothing beats playing through a loud rig with bandmates, but sadly that isn't always practical for the modern musician. A regular practice regime is normally pretty easy to execute at home, but on tour I find it hard. So how do other musicians practise on the road? Every band I know claims they will be 'writing' on the road and 'working up the new songs' at soundcheck. All well and good until you figure in the two-hour delay it took getting into town, the press the label has (hopefully!) organised, the radio station visit and of course the two support bands who also deserve to get a decent run at a soundcheck. A smartphone amp and headphones are fine but not much good if you want to be heard or jam with your band. Anyway, I think we've found a good solution: we carry a small 'dressing room' box in which we have a boombox with an iPod input, two mini Marshalls with headphone outs, cheap headphones, leads, picks, drum sticks and a drum warm-up pad. It's a really great way of working out stuff on the road in a civilised manner: we can rehearse segues, and new or old songs, and it has a small sonic and space footprint – much to the delight of road crews.

www.therapyquestionmark.co.uk

THE EXTENDED-RANGE SPECIALIST

STEWART MCKINSEY

Ten-string-wielding bass warlock Stew addresses the haters

I have made veiled and not-so-veiled references to this subject almost since I began writing for this magazine, but now I want to bring something front and centre: hate. If you haven't yet, you're going to encounter it. I have been a musician most of my life and a bassist for more than three decades. I moved to the then-new five-string bass in the 80s and was surprised to find that most resistance to my instrument came from other bassists. When I moved to the six-string not much later, confusion was replaced by outright hostility. When I broached the idea of an eight-string in 1989 to fellow players and builders, you wouldn't believe the animosity that came my way. To this day a week does not go by that I don't get hate mail. If you want to see some of it for yourself, find my YouTube channel and read some of the posted comments. The first thing you need to realise is that this is not personal. You're doing something different, and what is different is often regarded with confusion, fear and hostility. It makes others look at what they do, often unconsciously but generally uncomfortably. In this state, most animals lash out. And humans, no matter how educated or elevated, are still animals. Attack is somehow easier than pausing to reflect. Just as common is taking a defensive posture and feeling hurt or diminished. But there are any number of ways to meet these situations: you can rise to the challenge with explanation, humour or aggression. You can also opt not to deal with it. I will not tell you that any one path is correct or better than another. This is a personal thing. *Very* personal. But if you're going to be a visible artist in any way, I recommend you think about this. Being a great artist or having perfect technique is not enough. When words move past criticism, how will you face them?

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BASS TECHNIQUES

MAKING YOU A BETTER BASS PLAYER

Welcome to our redesigned techniques section, in which *Bass Guitar Magazine* collates the wit and wisdom of the *crème de la crème* of the electric and upright bass world. We're fortunate enough to have some serious talent on the team, from world-class music educators to experienced touring musicians, who between them have laid down the low notes in every studio, club and arena in the civilised world. Note that we've divided the columns according to **Beginner**, **Intermediate** and **Advanced** level for easy reference. Whether you're looking to improve your playing technique, expand your awareness of theory, set up your rig to sound like your particular bass hero or simply get on a bus and tour, we provide the answers you need here. What are you waiting for? Dive in...

Joel McIver, editor

Ellen O'Reilly is a freelance bassist and vocalist currently studying at ICMP. Ellen has extensive experience in gigging, studio and television work.
www.lowendlady.com

ELLEN O'REILLY BEGINNER'S THEORY 64

Paul Geary attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston and the Musicians' Institute of Technology. He also heads up the Academy Of Contemporary Music's bass school.
www.paulgeary.com

PAUL GEARY BEGINNER'S TECHNIQUES 66

Alex Webster founded the frankly terrifying Cannibal Corpse in 1988 and has guested since then on musically complex projects such as Blotted Science. He is the author of the Extreme Metal Bass instruction book.

ALEX WEBSTER INTERMEDIATE THEORY 68

Rob Statham has amassed over 25 years as a professional freelance bass player. He has played in a wide range of musical settings, including jazz, blues, prog and classical, and he has taught for the past three years at Tech Music School.

ROB STATHAM INTERMEDIATE TECHNIQUES 70

Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Brighton, Franc has worked with artists such as Steve Howe (Yes), Lisa Moorish, and Mike Lindup (Level 42). Franc uses Jeff Chapman basses and Elites strings.
www.francoshea.com

FRANC O'SHEA ADVANCED THEORY 74

Say hello to our new advanced techniques columnist Philip Mann, star of studio and stage. Ready to get those fingers flying? Mann up...

PHILIP MANN ADVANCED TECHNIQUES 76

David Etheridge studied double bass at the Royal College of Music. Since then he's worked with musicians such as Nigel Kennedy and Martin Taylor. David teaches double and electric bass and is the MD of two big bands and a 55-piece jazz orchestra.

DAVID ETHERIDGE UPRIGHT BASS 78

Kev Sanders is a freelance electric and double bassist.As well as numerous BBC radio and television sessions, he's played over 4,000 live gigs. He is the head of Bass Studies at AMS.
www.kevsanders.com

KEVIN SANDERS SOUND LIKE YOUR HEROES 80

ELLEN O'REILLY

BEGINNERS' GURU ELLEN GOES MINOR

Last month we discussed scales, in particular the major scale.This month we will look at the minor scale, which is made up of the formula T (tone), S (semitone), T, T, S, T, and T. Another way of thinking about this scale is with the intervals root (I), 2nd (II), 3rd (III), perfect 4th (IV), perfect 5th (V), 6th (VI) and 7th (VII).

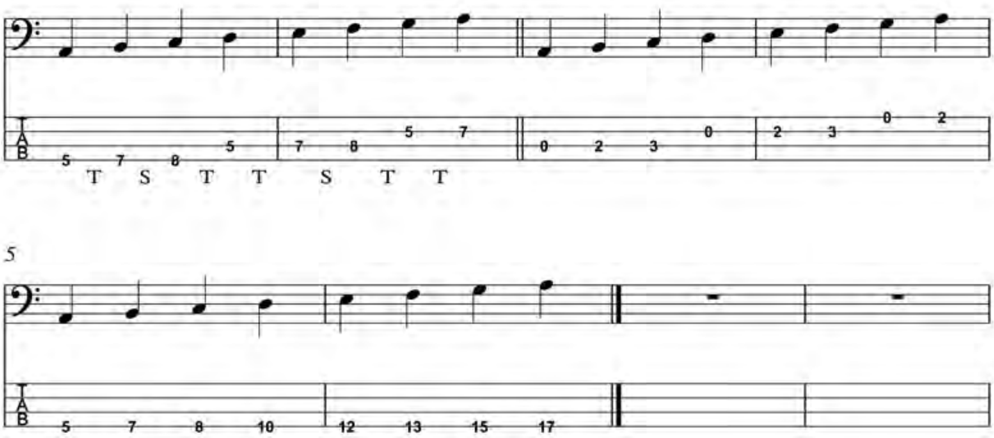
Using this formula you will hear how a minor scale should sound: whatever your root is makes it that minor key, for instance if you play A and use this scale, you will be playing in A minor. Try this out starting on a different root note each time. If possible, think of formulas (the T and S description above) when it comes to scales, because this will free you up to explore the fretboard more rather than limiting yourself to a single position.

Another name for the minor scale is Aoelian or the Aoelian mode, while another name for the major scale is the Ionian or the Ionian mode. (Modes are scales that are very useful when improvising, and we will look at them in future columns.) The major and minor scales are interrelated; every major key has a relative minor key, which means that they both share the same notes and accidentals. The relative minor of G major is E minor: they both share an F# and the relative minor of F major is D minor, which both share Bb. The easiest way of finding the relative minor of any key is to start at the root of the major key and move down three frets: that note will then be the root of the relative minor key.

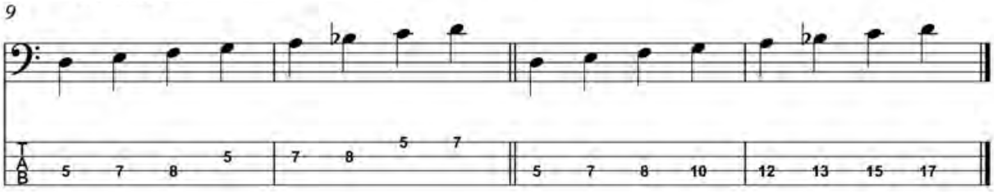
Being able to play through a chord chart is a useful skill and the scales you will learn directly relate to the type of scale they are. Use the major scale to play over major chords and the minor scale to play over minor chords. For example; if you see GMaj7, play within the major scale starting from G, and if you see C#min7 then play within the minor scale from the root of C#. Get yourself familiar enough with these scales so that you can use them in a musical way, play them in skips of thirds, break them up a little, explore and just have fun. Good luck low-enders!

Here are a few examples of the minor scale, there are many ways of playing it.
Start from any point on your fret board and move through all 12 keys.

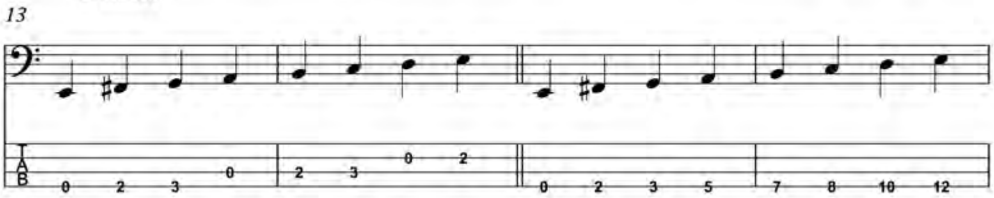
A minor



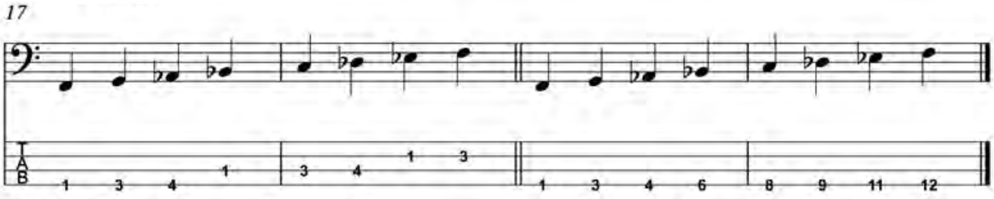
D minor



E minor



F minor



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PAUL GEARY

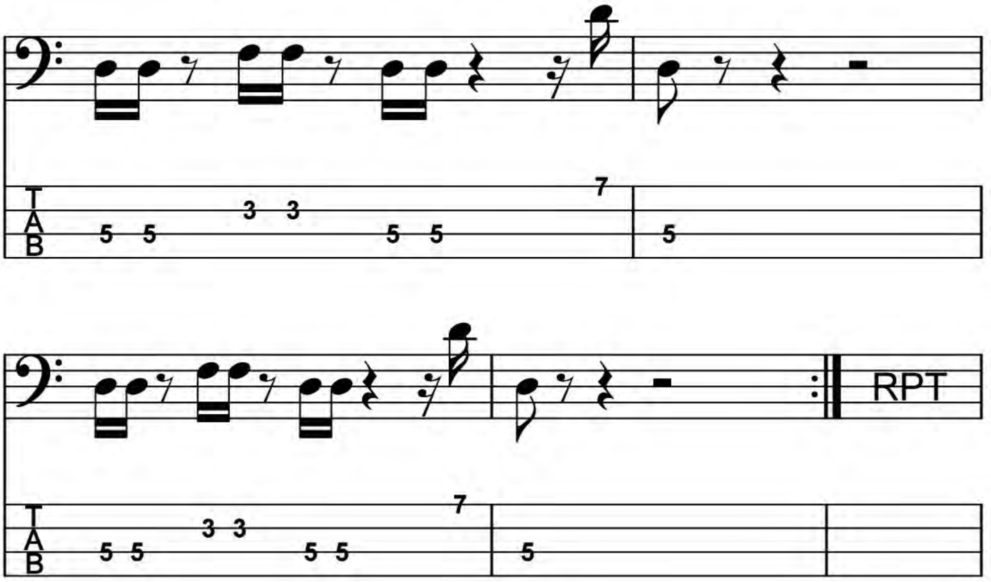
LESS IS MORE, SAYS OUR MAN GEARY

This next series of columns will concentrate on the construction of bass-lines built around simple chord progressions. Within this framework we will look at rhythm, time, tone and groove. It is important to remember that simple is actually difficult. Playing less puts your overall sound under the microscope. It is a common misconception that the more notes you play will deliver a better bass-line. It is actually the opposite.

A good bass-line needs to be played in time, with great tone, and above all the number of notes that is appropriate for the song. The song, and ultimately the music you play, is the most important factor in creating and playing any bass-line. In order to do this well, you will need to commit to the notes and groove, play with conviction and lots of self-belief. Let's get started...

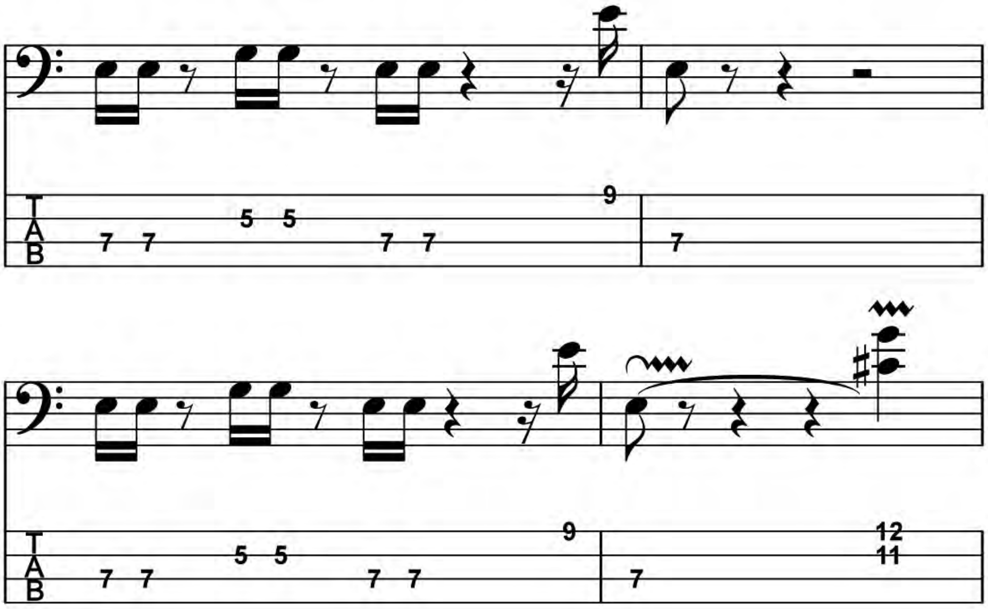
Example 1

The following examples are inspired by a track called 'People Say' by the Meters. Let's start by playing two 16th notes on D at the 5th fret of the A string. Be sure to get the rhythm correct, especially the 8th-note rests in between the first grouping of notes. The first bar finishes up with a 16th note octave played on the 7th fret of the G string. This is a vital note that leads into the second bar. Don't be tempted to fill the space in bar two, let the groove breathe. That's where the magic lies.



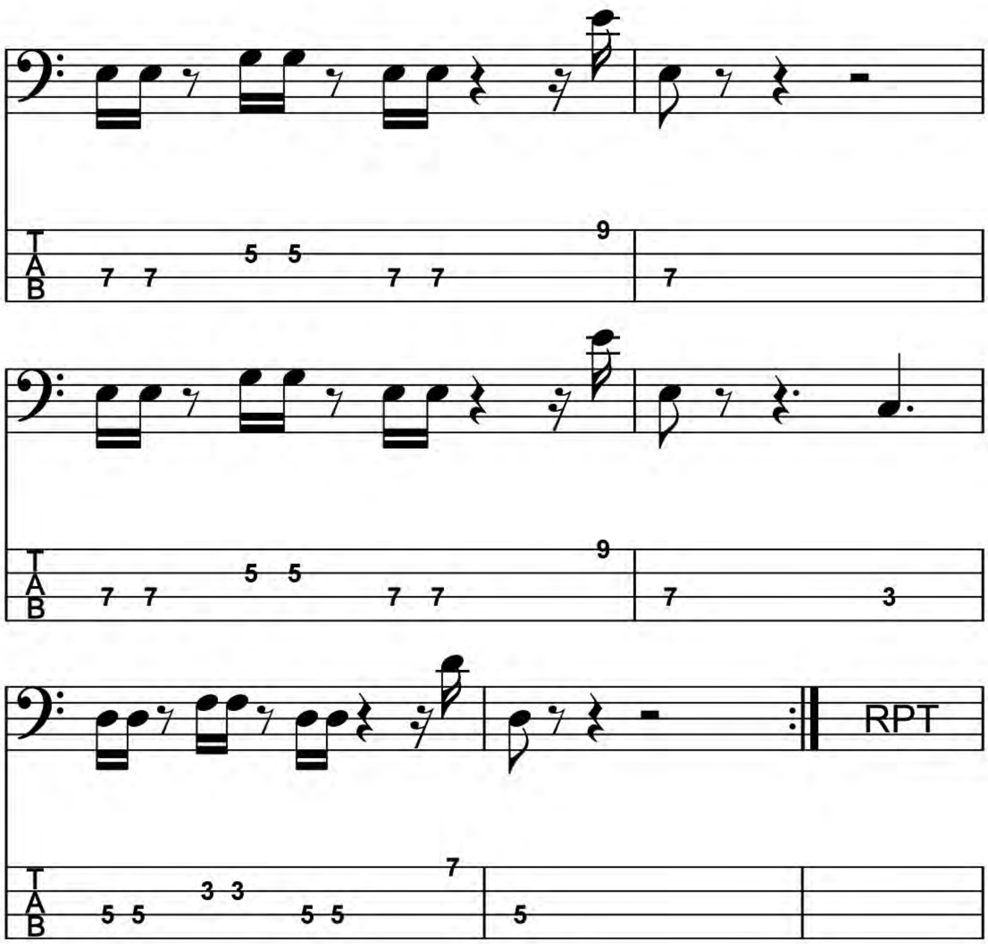
Examples 2 + 3

Continue with the basic groove, resisting the temptation to fill in the spaces. The only difference is that we have now modulated up a tone to E on the 7th fret of the A string. We then continue to play the minor 3rd pattern on G, 5th fret D string. Here I have included a slide and double-stop (two notes played together) at the end of bar four. This may need a little bit of isolation in looping the slide and double stop, in order to get the right sound and tone.



Extending your tone life

Play the C sharp (11th fret D string) with the first finger of the plucking hand, and the G (12th fret G string) with the second finger of the plucking hand. This will give you even tone and attack on the strings. At the fourth bar of *example three* we play a dotted quarter note on C (3rd fret A string) to get us back to the original starting note of D. Continue the bass-line as *example one*. Give the song a listen and pay particular attention to the space. Less is indeed more!



ALEX WEBSTER

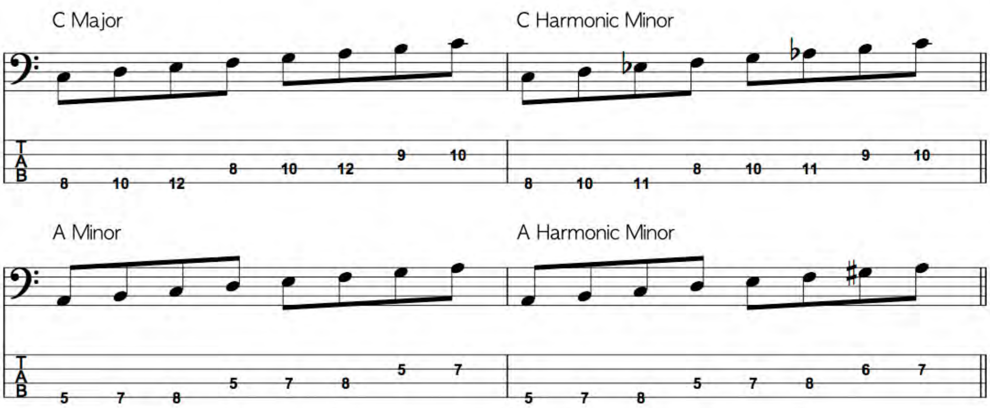
ALEX PROVIDES A RUN-THROUGH OF THE HARMONIC MINOR MODES

This month we're going to take a look at a popular and important scale: harmonic minor. The sound of this scale is quite distinct, and if you're a fan of neo-classical rock and metal you'll no doubt recognise it immediately. That said, it's also a versatile scale, and certainly not limited to one genre.

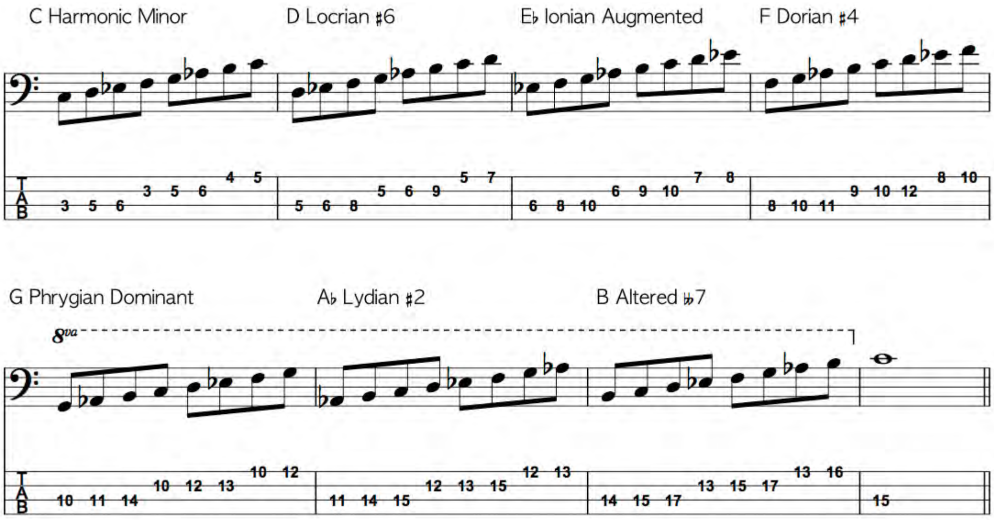
To begin with, let's compare harmonic minor to two scales you already know well: natural major and minor. *Example one* shows that one way to make the scale is to flatten the third and sixth degrees of a major scale, in this case C major. Another way would be take a minor scale, A minor in this case, and sharpen its seventh degree.

In *example two* we'll work through the harmonic minor modes from the perspective of it being an altered major scale. Using the same seven notes (C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, B) we can build modes by starting the scale from different degrees. For example, starting the scale at C creates harmonic minor, starting from D creates Locrian #6, starting from Eb you get Ionian augmented, and so forth. In my experience the most

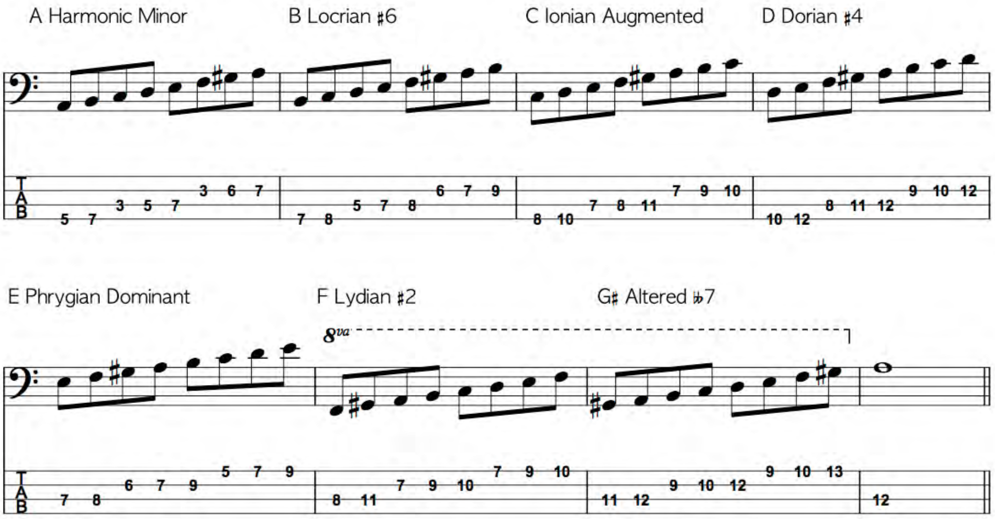
Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



Extending your tone life

commonly used of these modes after harmonic minor itself is the fifth mode, Phrygian dominant. It's often used as an alternative to Mixolydian when playing over dominant 7th chords, and can be heard frequently in jazz, flamenco, and other styles of music.

In *example three* we'll work through the scale again, this time looking at it as a minor scale with a sharp seventh. Now your seven notes will be A, B, C, D, E, F, and G#.

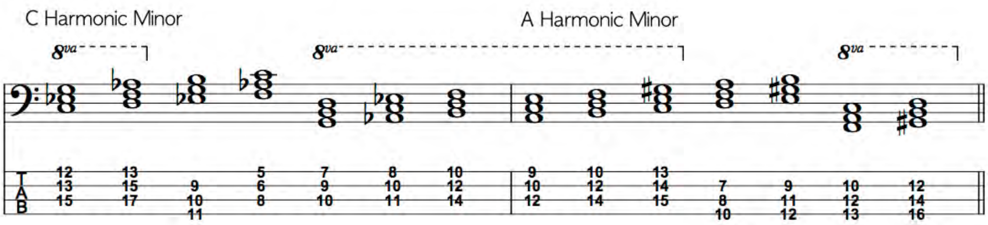
Example four shows the triads that go along with the modes shown in *examples two* and *three*. You can program these into a sequencer or record them in order to have some chordal accompaniment while you practise.

As you work through these examples you'll notice that that what really gives this scale its flavour is the minor 3rd/half step segment. In the two scales you've looked at today – C and A harmonic minor – the segments are Ab, B, C, and F, G#, A, respectively. Wherever these occur within each particular mode you'll immediately notice that distinct sound. In fact, after you've spent enough time with harmonic minor, simply hearing a minor third to half step progression will remind you of the rest of the scale.

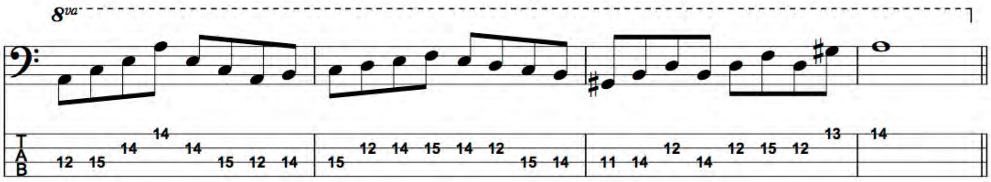
To wrap things up let's work through a short musical in *example five* using A harmonic minor. Notice that in the third bar you're actually playing a G# diminished 7th arpeggio. This chord is found within the scale, and it works very well to create some leading-tone tension before being resolving with the scale's tonic (A) in the final bar.

Harmonic minor is a useful scale that all bassists would be well advised to become familiar with. Although it's quite common, it can still add an 'exotic' feel to your bass-lines and soloing.

Example 4



Example 5



ROB STATHAM

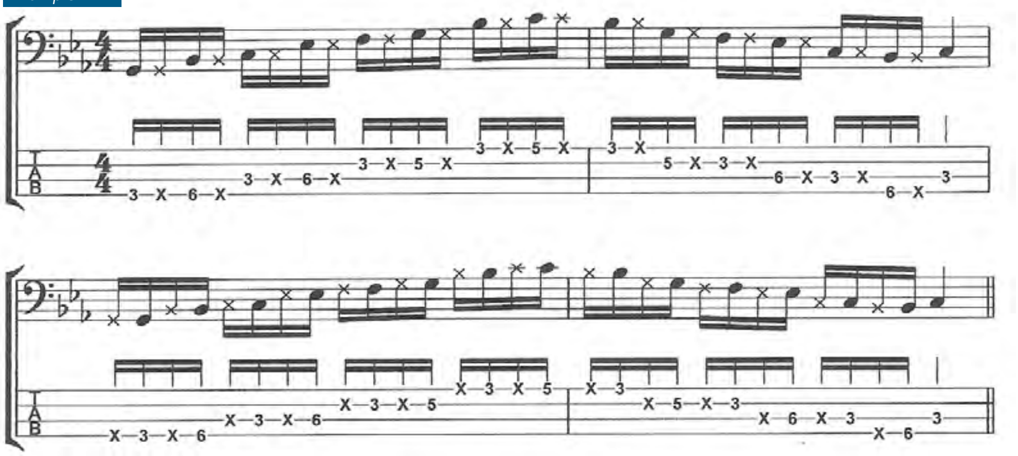
IS IT HALLOWEEN? PROF STATHAM GOES ALL GHOSTLY ON US...

In a previous column we have looked at various aspects of articulation available to us, and this month I want to focus particularly on dead notes and how they can be used to accent and rhythmically shape a line. A dead note, sometimes called a ghost note or muted note, is a note of indeterminate pitch used to add colour and rhythmic inflection to a bass-line. They are especially a feature of 16th-note funk grooves, but are useful in many stylistic contexts, and can add a great deal of colour and variety to our bass-lines.

It is instructive to hear how the use of dead notes in different places in the same bass-line can greatly change the character of the line, something I illustrate in the first example, a two bar, 16th-note C minor pentatonic idea. The dead notes are denoted by an 'x' as the note head, and are played by dampening (but not holding down and fretting) the string with the left hand. Care needs to be taken to avoid any unwanted harmonics ringing out. To this end, it is advisable to dampen the strings with several fingers where possible.

As you can see, in the first two bars I have indicated that the second and fourth note of each group of four sixteenths is to be played as a dead note. The tones fretted normally are accentuating the downbeats, with the dead notes playing the sixteenth syncopations, the upbeats. However, in the second two bars I turn this around, so now we are playing the first and third sixteenth as dead

Example 1

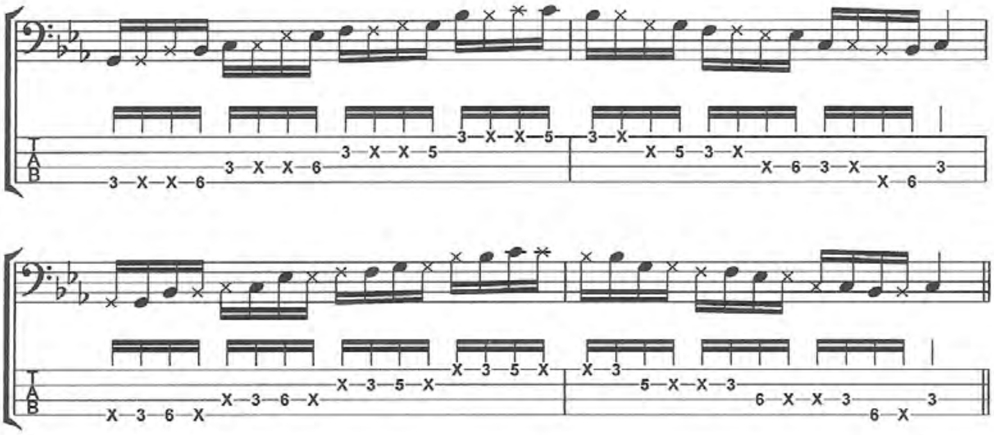


notes, thus the tones fretted normally are now accentuating the upbeats. This totally changes the character of the line rhythmically, as you can hear.

In the second example I have taken this same idea a stage further. Now, in the first two bars, we alternate within each four-note group, starting with the normally fretted tone followed by the dead note, and turning this around for the second half of the beat, a pattern we continue through the two bars. Then, in the second two bars, we start the other way around, each four-note group starting with a dead note followed by a normally fretted tone. This is then turned around in the second half of the beat, again continuing that pattern for the rest of the two bars.

As you can hear, this provides some interesting rhythmic variations on the basic idea and, of course, one might combine the dead note on either the upbeat or the downbeat in many different ways to create even more

Example 2



variation, still all based on the same basic idea. This is a good place to start in order to acquire a vocabulary using dead notes: take bass-lines you already know and apply some of these concepts to them.

Besides changing the accent from downbeat to upbeat and vice versa, we can also use dead notes to imply polyrhythmic effects, creating asymmetric note groupings such as the groups of three in the next example. This is a two-bar D7 or D minor 7 idea – it could work for either chord, the third being omitted – with note groupings of three, each grouping consisting of one fretted tone followed by two dead notes. Where the notes change pitch it is easy to hear the grouping of three, but where successive groupings are of the same pitch (eg the second and third grouping of three in the first bar, both on the note C), it is the dead notes that outline the shape.

Extending your tone life

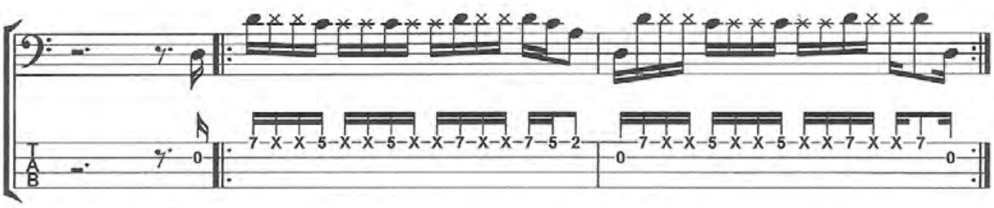
Notice that in the first bar the groups of three begin on the downbeat, thus we have four groups of three with one whole beat left over at the end of the bar. In the second bar, I have displaced them by a sixteenth note, thus the groups of three begin on the second sixteenth of the first beat. Again, it would be possible to take this as a starting point and create more variations using the same bass-line. For instance, we might decide to also define a group of three with two normally fretted tones and one dead note. Or we might decide to define a group of three by a dead note, followed by a normally fretted note, and finally another dead note – the possible combinations while still using the same basic idea are many.

The final example is a four-bar bass-line on an E7 chord, again using groups of three. Firstly, take a look at the second and fourth bar, where I have used combinations of two one-beat sixteenth note patterns – an eighth note beamed to two sixteenths, or the reverse, two sixteenths beamed to an eighth note. In each case, the two sixteenths are played as dead notes, meaning the fretted tone is either on the beat or on the 'and' of the beat. Combing these two elements in different ways can provide some effective variation, switching the emphasis between the downbeat and the upbeat and you will notice that in bars two and four the idea is expressed somewhat differently, the two elements combined in contrasting ways.

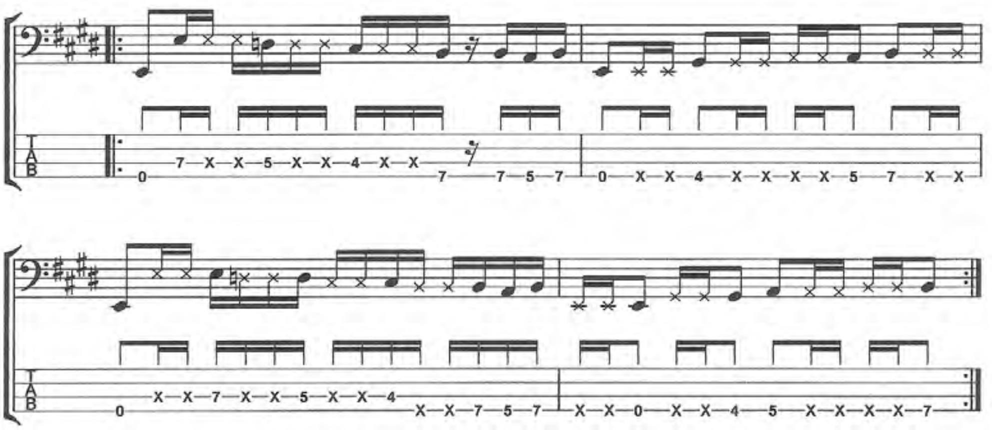
These two one-beat figures are very useful when creating sixteenth note lines. The different rhythmic inflections that can be derived by combining them in different ways are a source of great variation while remaining pretty constant in terms of note choice. Returning to the first and third bar where I have used a 'group of three' concept, you will notice that in the first bar this is expressed as a fretted tone followed by two dead notes, whereas in the third bar the groups of three are expressed as two dead notes with the fretted tone last, again adding yet another subtle variation while remaining true to the basic bass-line.

As you can see, imaginative use of dead notes can provide a plethora of ways of adding variation and nuance to our bass-lines, and it is a technique well worth working into your playing. Ensure that your fretting-hand fingers stay close to the strings at all times, making any muting a minimal movement, which is, in any case, a matter of good basic playing technique. Explore some of these ideas, apply them to bass-lines you already know, and create your own vocabulary of ideas using dead notes.

Example 3



Example 4



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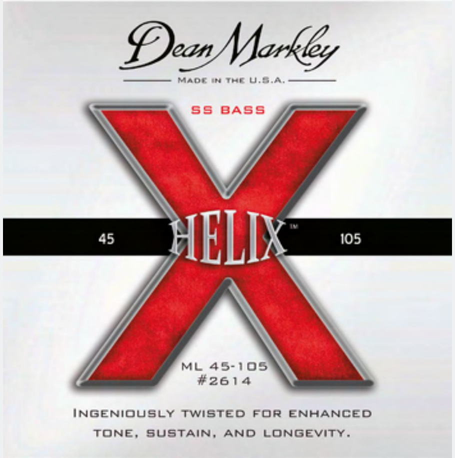

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FRANC O'SHEA

THIS MONTH FRANC DELVES DEEPER INTO SCALE SUBSTITUTIONS. DIVE IN!

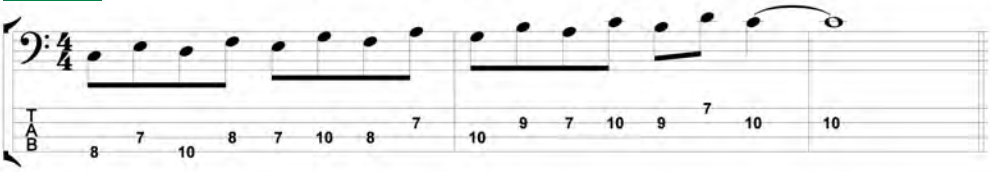
In this month's column I will be continuing my look into soloing on more traditional jazz styles by exploring the development of motifs: melodic devices that can be used for improvisation. Some of you may think I appear to be contradicting myself by proposing the use of motifs, since in previous *BGM* columns I have made a case against using other players' 'licks'. Well, motifs are different to licks. A motif is a group of pitches (or even a rhythmic pattern) that can be used in a number of ways. A motif can be placed rhythmically in different parts of the bar; it can be used as a springboard for launching other ideas; it can be transposed to various degrees of a tonal centre to highlight different chord tones; it can be a fragment of a string of several ideas all linked together into a cohesive whole. However, a lick is usually someone else's idea copied wholesale and executed verbatim without the inclusion of any creative input from the player.

Some players know a load of 'licks' but don't understand how or why they work, whereas to use motifs effectively you need to know what is going on musically. Licks are inflexible ideas that are set in stone, whereas motifs are versatile and can be used at will in a variety of situations. A good analogy is that motifs are like words, which can be combined in inventive ways to make unique statements, while licks are similar to fixed dialogue. The use of language doesn't limit your self-expression unless you only use prescribed sentences.

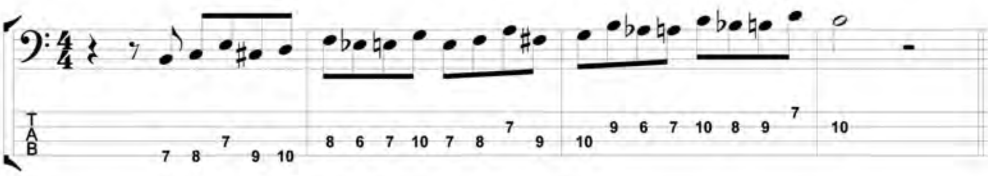
One of the greatest motif users of all time was jazz legend Charlie Parker. His improvisational method was analysed in detail by Thomas Owens in his famous 1974 PhD. dissertation *Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation* from the University of California. Owens' meticulous research into Parker's solos demonstrates that Parker had a foundational vocabulary of approximately 100 motifs that he could combine in a variety of ways to create a host of new patterns.

Motifs are not generally used in isolation but in combination with other musical elements such as scales,

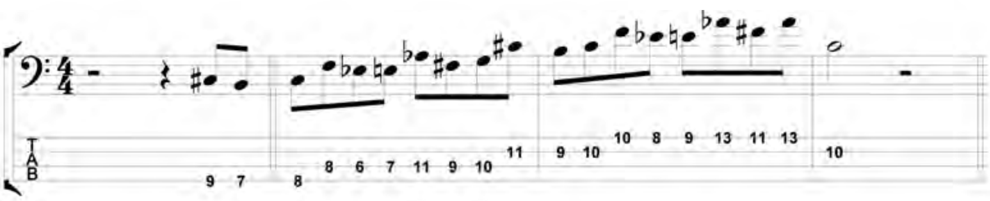
Example 1



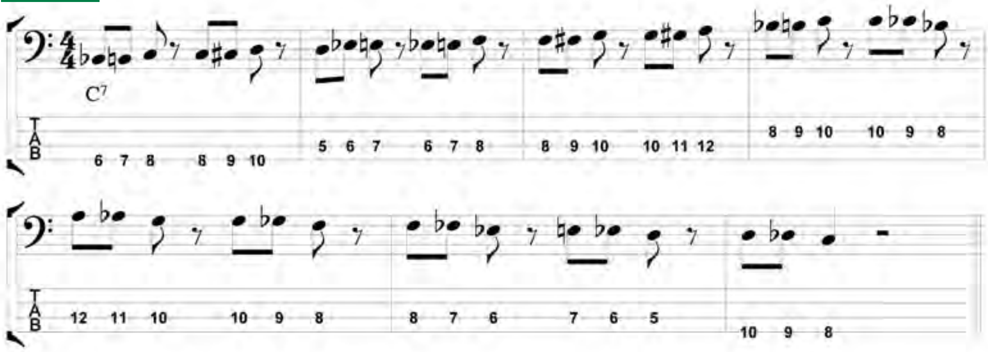
Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



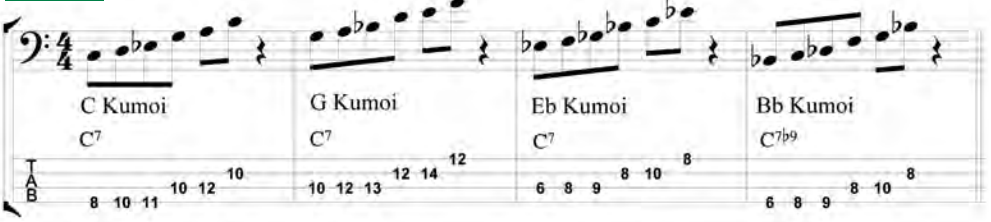
arpeggios and substitutions, which have been the focus of my previous columns on soloing.

Example one demonstrates a common way of practising scales by playing the relevant third from each ascending scale degree. Those of you familiar with this exercise will probably have played it descending as well. However, *example two* adds a new twist to the pattern by placing a chromatic note-leading note before the root of each third, creating a more involved, jazzier sound. You can also use the same principle of adding a chromatic leading note to scales played with any interval pattern such as 4ths, 5ths and the particularly jazzy-sounding 6ths.

Example three demonstrates a sort of jazz 'turn'. A classical 'turn' is where you have a foundational note that you ornament by playing notes around it. In the case of a normal turn it would be the note above, the note itself, the note below, and

Extending your tone life

Example 5



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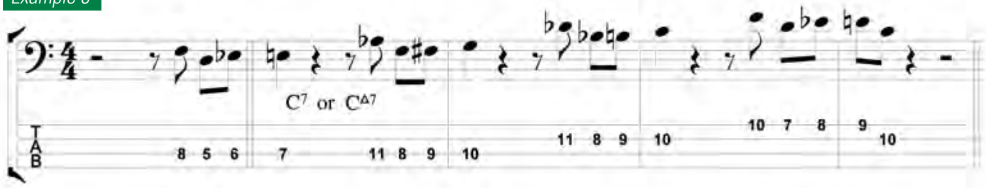
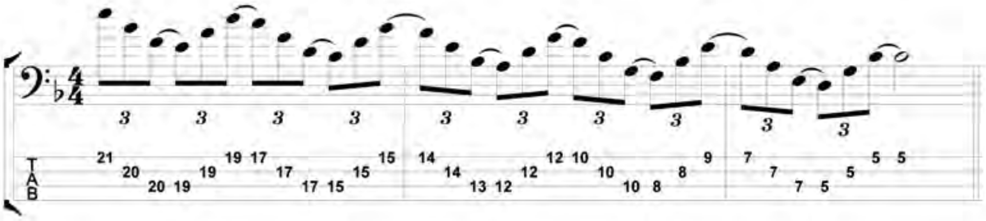
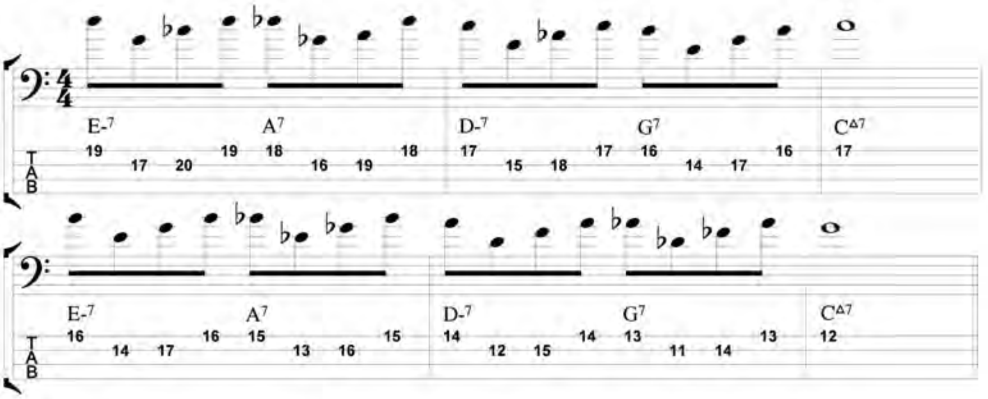


Example 7



Example 8



finally the note itself once more. All these notes would be diatonic, ie part of the key scale. An inverted turn would proceed with the note below the foundational note. The jazz turn presented here starts out with the chromatic above the target note, then the chromatic note below it, before finally reaching the target note itself. These types of chromatic decoration can often be found in bebop tunes and solos. For instance, one appears in the transition from bar four to bar five in the melody of Parker's 'Donna Lee' and outlines the change from the major 3rd of the Bb7 to the minor 3rd of the Bbmin7.

Example four demonstrates the possibility of linking two notes that are a tone apart in the scale, by using the chromatic note that appears between them. The example demonstrates that this can be done when either ascending or descending. You will also note that the tone from the minor 3rd to the perfect 4th is included, even though the chord indicated is a dominant 7th. This is because the minor 3rd can be used on a dominant 7th chord to create a jazz/blues sound. An example of this can be seen once again in the melody of 'Donna Lee', where in the first bar the major 6th of the Abmaj7 chord moves down chromatically, via the minor 6, to land on the b7 of the F7 in the second bar.

Example five demonstrates how a group of interesting notes, in this case the Kumoi (1, 2, b3, 5, 6) pentatonic scale, can be used from different scale/chord degrees to create a variety of melodic textures.

Example six provides another type of Jazz 'turn', however, in this example the target note is preceded by three other notes. The motif starts out with the note a semitone above the target note before descending to the note a tone beneath the target note, from which it moves up a semitone and then another semitone to eventually reach its desired destination. Parker sometimes used this motif: I have heard of it being called a 'corkscrew', probably because it spirals back on itself.

APP EXTRA

Example seven is more of a pattern than a particular motif. This series of descending and ascending diatonic 4ths, in an overall descending framework, creates a more modern, quartal sound. Also, you could reverse the overall direction.

Example eight demonstrates how you can move melodic fragments or arpeggios in semitones. In this example the motifs are shown as chromatically descending: however, depending on the context, they could ascend too. The example here demonstrates two tonal positions in which the pattern could occur. Both work well with the same chord sequence and highlight chord tones and other notes.

Next month I will be looking at which scales and arpeggios will work over the chord sequence for 'Donna Lee' in preparation for the following month, when I will be bringing together everything we have looked at so far to see how we could use these ideas to create an effective solo in the context of an actual jazz standard. You may well want to start looking at the chord progression for 'Donna Lee' to familiarise yourself with its structure in advance. Until next month…

PHIL MANN

MANN UP WITH SOME KILLER AUGMENTATIONS FROM ADVANCED TECHNIQUES ACE PHIL

Welcome to another instalment of *BGM's* advanced techniques column! This month we'll be continuing our extended technique studies and spending a little time investigating the augmented and diminished family types. Be warned! You may need the Prozac on hand for this issue; it's going to get somewhat dissonant over the next few pages!

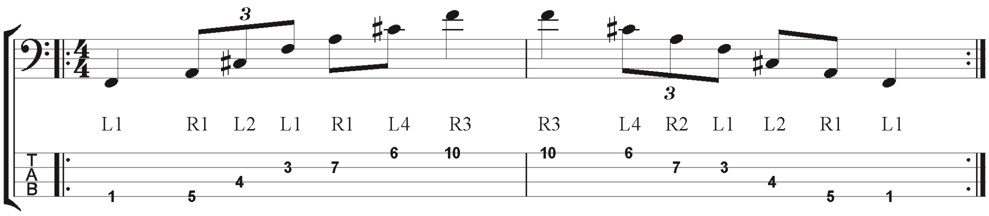
Last month's disciplines comprised of a number of exercises focused on analysing consonant triad families. Retrospectively, these exercises sampled work from major and minor triads and delivered them over two octaves. This month our time will be spent looking at the dissonant triad types to complete the study.

Dissonant triad families require a great deal more discipline and care in their application, partly due to the amount of tension they produce when executed. As previously mentioned, when using consonant triads, their application can be palatable in most positions, whereas the placement of diminished and augmented chords needs to be more thoughtful and refined, as once played, they will tend to immediately want to move to another chord in order to resolve – something that isn't as evident with major or minor chords.

Our studies today will specifically focus on the analysis of augmented and diminished edifices. A root position augmented triad is constructed by stacking a pair of major 3rd intervals on top of one another. Augmented triads are most commonly found in harmonic and melodic minor harmony and, although they suggest a key centre, they do not actually belong to a key signature. Thus, the following exercises have been written in accidentals in the key centre of F, endorsing the fingering patterns: L (left hand), R (right hand), 1 (index finger), 2 (middle finger), 3 (ring finger), and 4 (little finger). Work through the following examples, transposing their melodic information into all 12 keys.

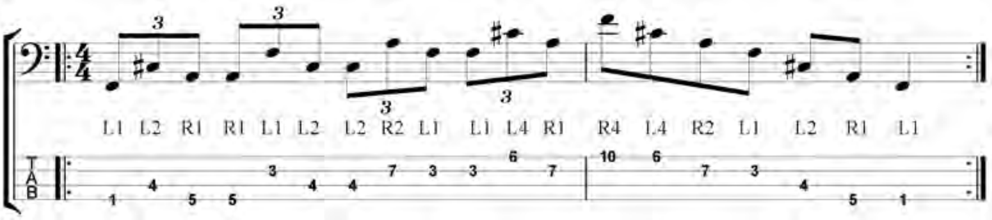
Example 1

Augmented triad studies:



Example 2

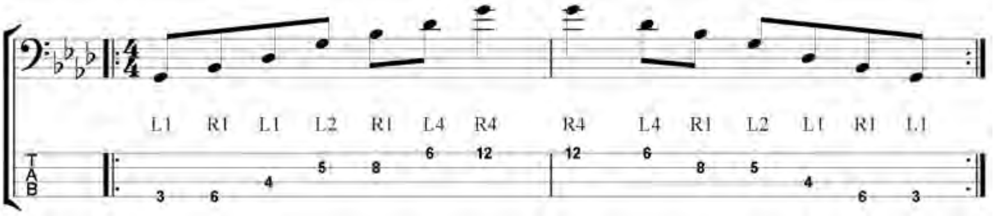
Augmented triad studies:



Diminished triads are produced by once again stacking two intervals of thirds on top of one another: this time, however, both intervals are minor 3rds. Examine the following exercises and then transpose the information into all 12 keys.

Example 3

Diminished triad studies:



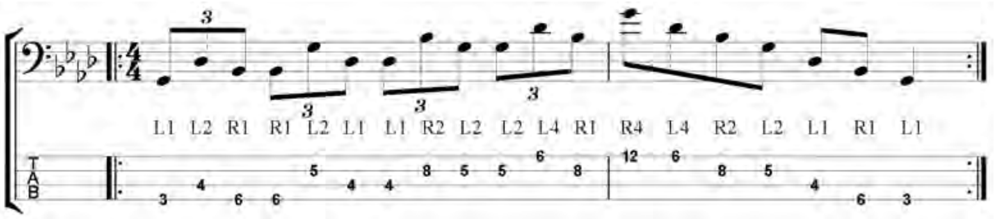
Example 4

Although seldom used as major VII chords in contemporary compositions, you do commonly come across diminished triads when implemented prior to a IIm-V-I turnaround in jazz. When executed a semitone higher than the initial chord of the turnaround, a diminished triad's presence draws the motion of the progression towards the IIm.

This is due to the notes that reside within both triads. On examination, you'll notice that one pitch of the two chords remains consistent, while the other two pitches of each chord are only a semitone apart, thus creating the tension that wishes to resolve. This application of diminished chords can commonly be applied to most jazz standards. For example, check out exercise five where this theory has been

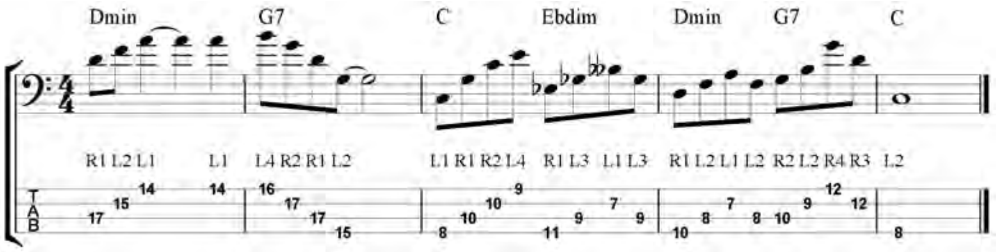
Extending your tone life

endorsed over the ending to a chord progression reminiscent of Simone & Marks' 'All Of Me'. Until next time, practise hard!



Example 5

Major II-V-I with enhanced harmony



DAVID ETHERIDGE

DOUBLE BASS LEGEND ETHERIDGE DISCOVERS THAT SCALES ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS TO EFFECTIVE BASS PARTS

Now, let's look at scales. Yes, I know that some people regard them as unutterably boring, and working on them can be a pain, until you realise that they are one of the building blocks of music. This is your basic musical vocabulary, and like all simple principles, they can be extended to unheard-of lengths.

Let's use scales to make a walking bass part under a four-bar chord sequence, using the chords as the basic guideline: see *example one*. As you can see, it now has direction as we move in and out of the scales that belong to each chord. As with chord notes, you can vary the approach to almost infinite degrees. *Example two* shows a slightly different approach, where we can use chord as well as scale notes in the part. Strictly speaking, the A natural at the end of bar one could be regarded as a passing tone, but would also fit if you regarded the first chord of the sequence as a Bbmaj7. Either way, it gives a smooth and logical step from the Bb chord to the Gm chord. You can also have fun changing chord tones to chromatic steps in the sequence.

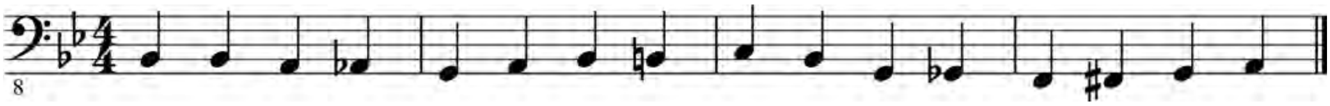
Now have a look at *example three*. Here we follow a rule I saw suggested many years ago in a book on bass playing, which suggests approaching each new chord from a note a semitone away. Here we approach the G from an Ab, the Cm from B natural, and the F from a Gb. Of course, you can experiment and try it from the other direction, as in *example four*. Here we come up to the G from F#, down to the C via Db, up to the F with E natural, and just for that cool factor, add a Cb at the end of the last bar if we want to go back to the Bb chord again. In this case the Cb would be regarded as a b5th of the F7 chord, which is a very subtle and 'hip' sound, not to mention giving a very smooth transition back to the home key.

So far I've looked at smooth steps between notes. We can, using the scalic approach, introduce jumps of up to an octave. However, don't use it to excess, as in *example five*: this gives a jumpy and clunky effect. Try this one, which should be smoother.

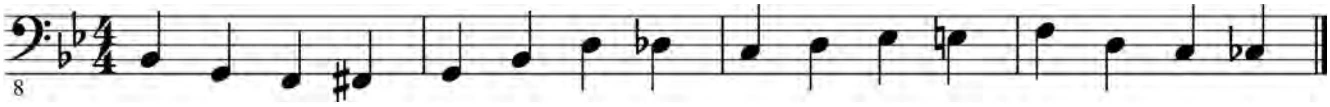
Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

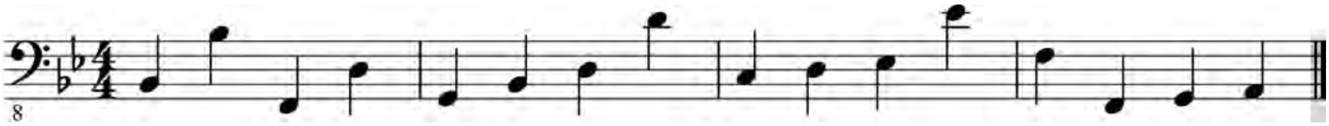


Example 4



Extending your tone life

Example 5



Example 6

"I KNOW THAT SOME PEOPLE REGARD SCALES AS UNUTTERABLY BORING, AND WORKING ON THEM CAN BE A PAIN, UNTIL YOU REALISE THAT THEY ARE ONE OF THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF MUSIC"

Here's *example six*: you can see that we're using the octave jump and then chord or scale tones to move to the next chord or register that we want.

Have fun trying out scale approaches to chord changes, and combine them with chord tones in any combination to see what you come up with. I've only given you examples based on four chords: many jazz standards have far more, and offer incredible scope for creative part building. We'll look at more approaches next time.

APP EXTRA
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KEVIN SANDERS

COLONEL SANDERS HAILS THE MIGHTY JAMES JAMERSON, FATHER OF ELECTRIC BASS

It's been ages since we took a look at the playing of James Jamerson, so a revisit is well overdue. Like many of his era, Jamerson started out by playing double bass in high school jazz bands. His break came when he was hired by Berry Gordy, the boss of Motown Records, to go on a series of tours supporting signed artists. Jamerson was perfect for the job and from the early 60s, Motown employed him as their first choice bass player. He went on to play on nearly all of the great songs to come from Hitsville USA, the small studio that was the home of Motown.

In 1973, Motown moved to Los Angeles, and Jamerson followed. He continued to play on numerous hits, both for Motown and as a freelancer, but his alcohol problems and reluctance to adopt newer styles and approaches meant that work became less and less frequent. For the next 10 years things slowly went from bad to worse. As well as being seriously injured in a mugging, Jamerson's health slowly declined and in 1983 he died from liver failure at the age of just 47.

GEAR

Apart from the old German double bass used on some of his early recordings, of which Martha & The Vandellas' 'Heatwave' and Mary Wells' 'My Guy' are two of the best known, most of Jamerson's career was spent playing his sunburst 62 Fender Precision. Back then, Fender basses came with chrome bridge and pickup covers, and Jamerson was one of the few bassists who preferred to leave these on the bass, often pushing a piece of foam inside the bridge cover to dampen the sound.

The strings he used were heavy LaBella flatwounds (52 to 110) and legend has it that he never, ever changed them. Jamerson's amp of choice was the Ampeg B15 flip-top combo, although for most of the Motown sessions he was plugged straight into the desk. All these elements were part of Jamerson's, and Motown's, sound but the most important aspect was his right hand technique. He would use only his index finger (which he nicknamed 'the hook') while resting his second and third fingers on the chrome pickup cover. This meant that he would pluck the strings further toward the neck of the bass, enhancing its rich, plummy tone.

STYLE

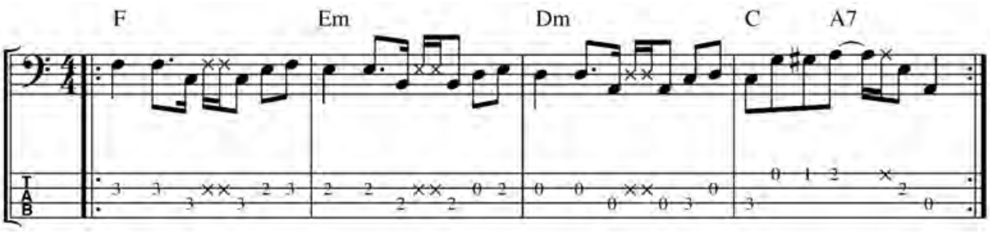
Jamerson's approach was to provide a rhythmic and melodic counterpoint to the vocal line, rather than the traditional 'root-5' style that had been so common before. He was a great sight-reader, but he was also a great jazz player and would usually improvise the bass-line using just a chord sheet and his ears.

Jamerson's normal approach was to state the root note on the first beat of the bar, then outline the chord using simple diatonic harmony – nothing unusual there, but it was his ability to lay down a bass-line that rhythmically complemented the vocal line which really stands out. A favourite trick of Jamerson's was to use the sixth to create tension: a great example of this can be heard in his intro to 'Ain't That Peculiar'. It's also interesting to note how Jamerson would sometimes play his trademark phrases, even when they didn't exactly fit harmonically. If you listen carefully to his bass-line on, for example, 'Heard it Through The Grapevine', there are plenty of examples of this.

Example 1

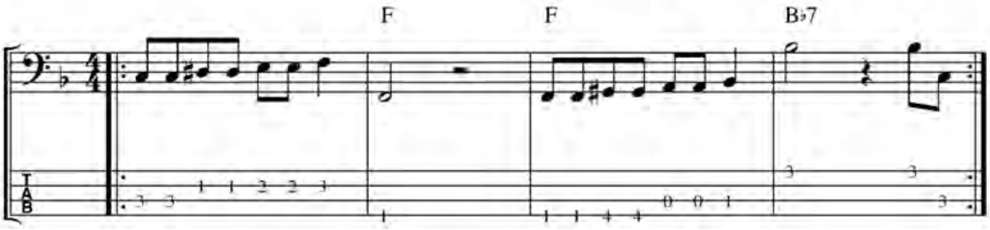
Here are three examples illustrating some of his other trademark harmonic and rhythmic ideas. To get an authentic tone, all these exercises should be played Jamerson-style in half or first position.

This exercise shows how Jamerson would often use dampened ghost-notes to add a percussive element to his lines.



Example 2

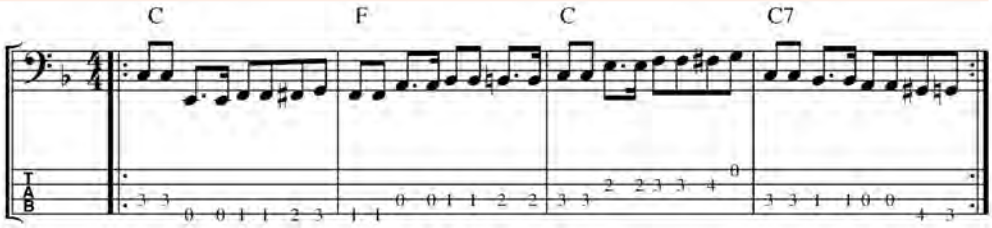
This exercise illustrates how Jamerson would often use ascending diatonic or (more often) chromatic phrases to reach the next chord tone.



Extending your tone life

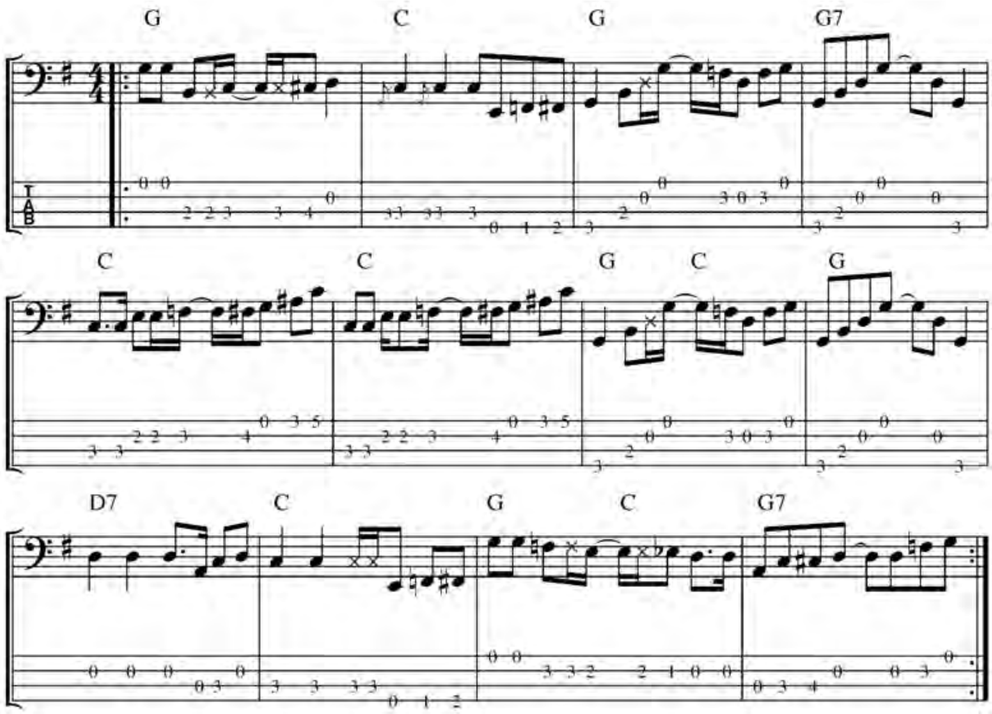
Example 3

Jamerson often used 'swing quavers' to add momentum to his bass lines, frequently as part of the chromatic movement to the next chord change.



Example 4

Here's a 12-bar example that uses a typical Jamerson style bass-line. Unless you're lucky enough to own a 62 Fender Precision with very dead flatwound strings, try using the neck pickup of your bass and taking out most of the top and very low bass frequencies to approximate the sound. You could even try the old trick of putting an elastic hair tie just in front of the nut to dampen sustain.



ESSENTIAL TRACKS

Listen to any Motown recording between 1960 and 70 and you'll almost definitely be listening to Jamerson. There are dozens of number one hits to choose from, but here are a few real highlights.

'Ain't No Mountain High Enough', Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell
A duet by two of the darlings of Motown and a massive hit single, as well as one of the most important records released by the Motown label. Sublime bass playing from Jamerson and the Funk Brothers, plus the Detroit Symphony Orchestra strings.

'For Once In My Life', Stevie Wonder
Textbook Jamerson bass playing on this 67 Stevie Wonder recording – just listen to that tone and timing!

'My Girl', The Temptations
One of the few tracks recorded by Jamerson on double bass.

'What's Goin' On', Marvin Gaye
Recorded toward the end of Jamerson's career, but one of his best and a part that almost stands on its own as an improvised countermelody.

'I Heard It Through The Grapevine', Marvin Gaye
A simple but effective quaver feel drives this track forward, helped

APP EXTRA

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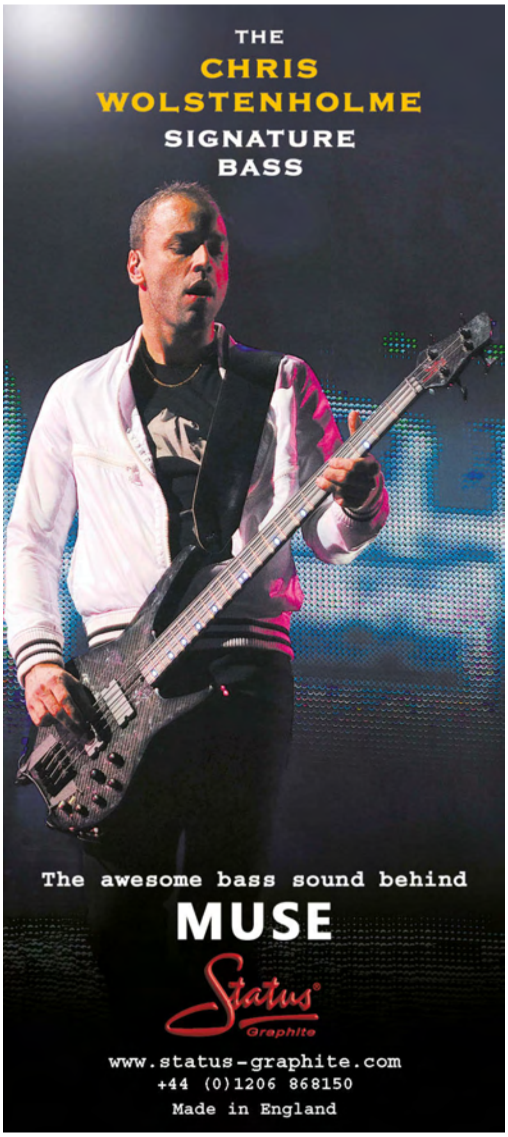

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